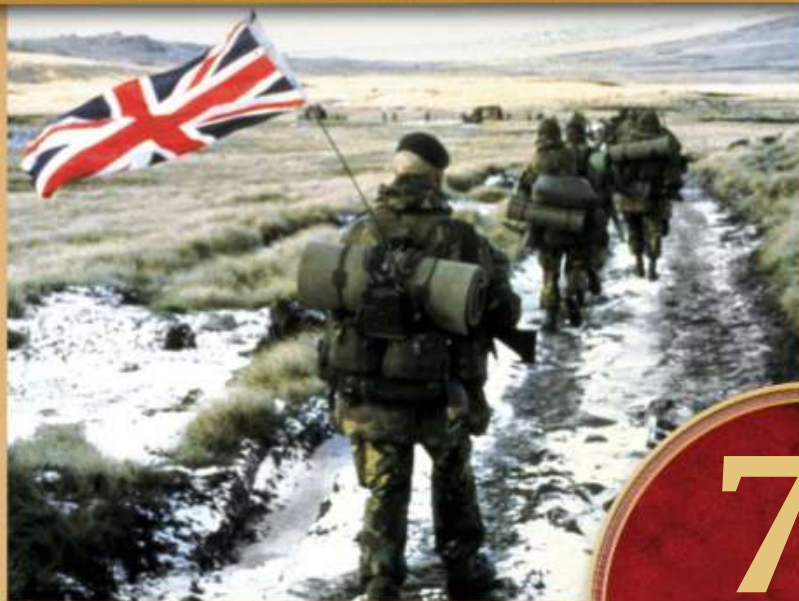


# MILITARY HEROES OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

DISCOVER THE WORLD'S MOST ICONIC  
ARMED FORCES AND FEARLESS WARRIORS



75  
years on from  
Operation  
Overlord

Digital  
Edition



FIRST  
EDITION

GALLANT SOLDIERS ★ SAS ACES ★ FALKLANDS FIGHTERS





# WELCOME TO MILITARY ★HEROES★ OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

With two World Wars in its first half, not to mention countless smaller conflicts in the decades before and after, the 20th century had no shortage of opportunities for military heroes to prove themselves on the field of battle. This bookazine starts with a sergeant major who was first deployed in the year 1900, a bolt-action Lee rifle in his hand. War would evolve dramatically throughout the 20th century: it would take to the seas and to the sky. New technologies would allow new kinds of attack and defence; new tactics would be needed to combat them. And for every new technology, a hero would rise to take it on. Here you'll find out about the first pilot to shoot down a Zeppelin, and the master sergeant who took out five tanks singlehandedly. You'll discover the courage and cunning of the highly selective special forces, and the bravery of the hundreds of everyday people who helped support the nascent RAF during the Battle of Britain. These people, and many more, are the military heroes of the 20th century.



「 FUTURE 」



# MILITARY HEROES OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

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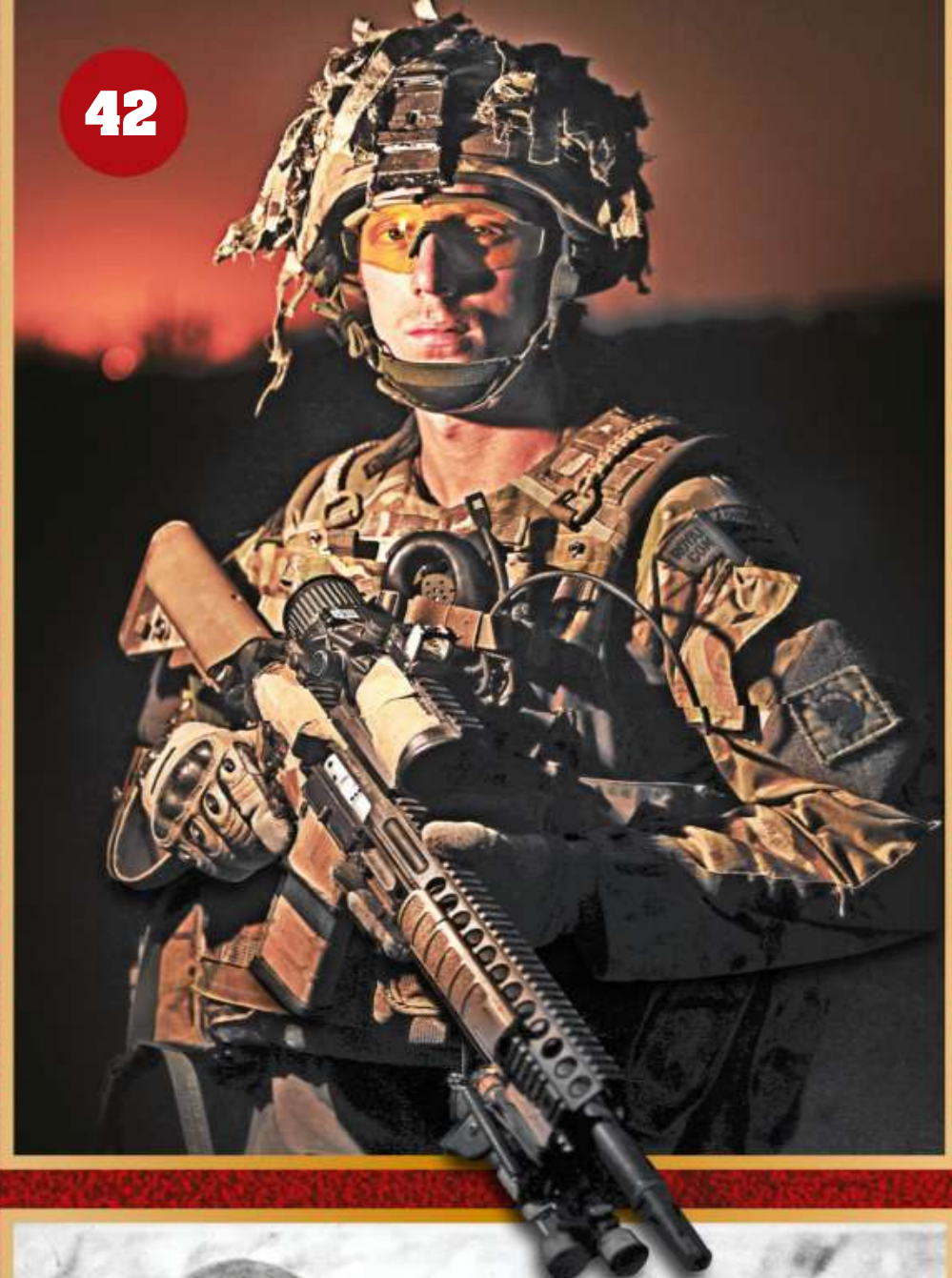
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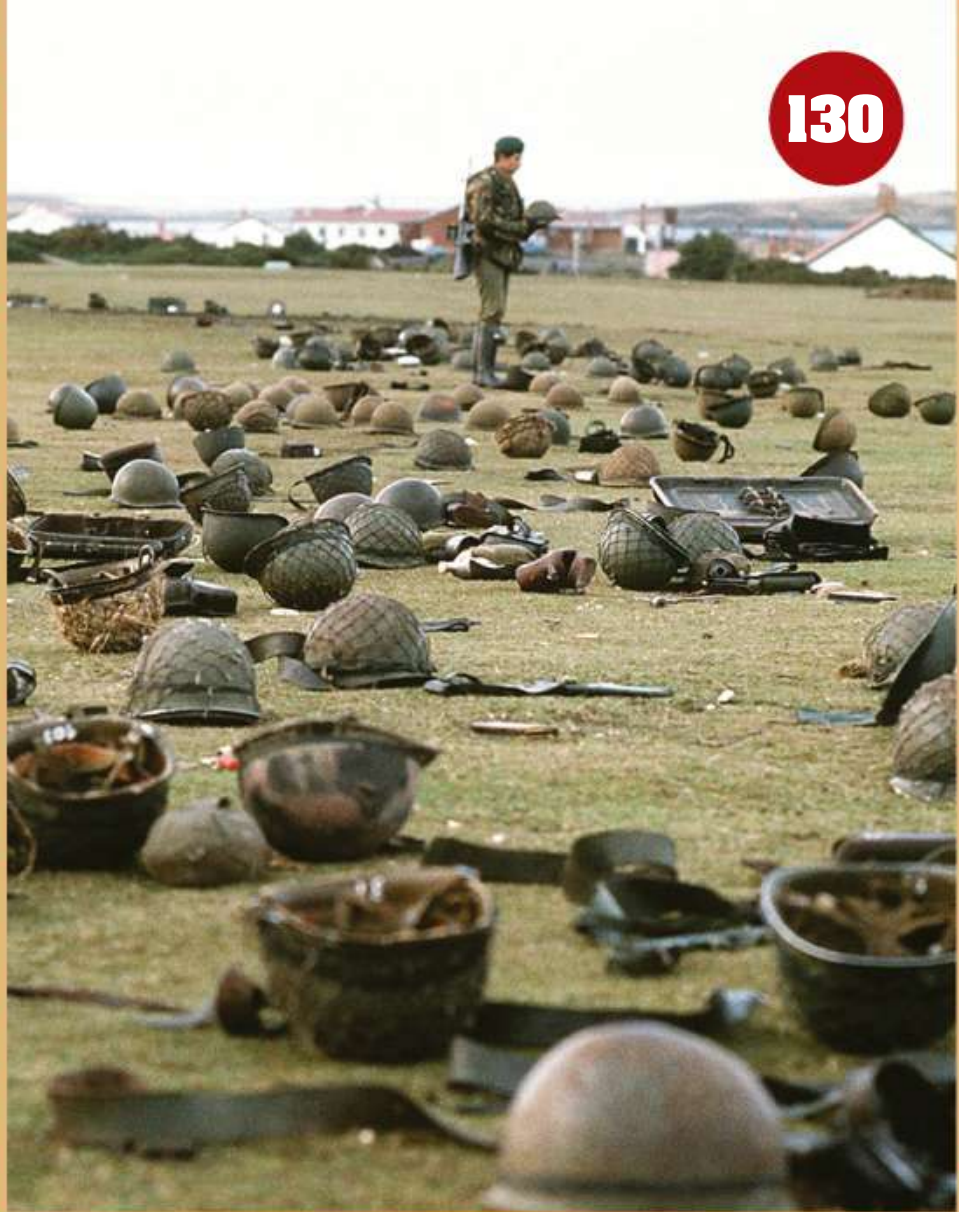
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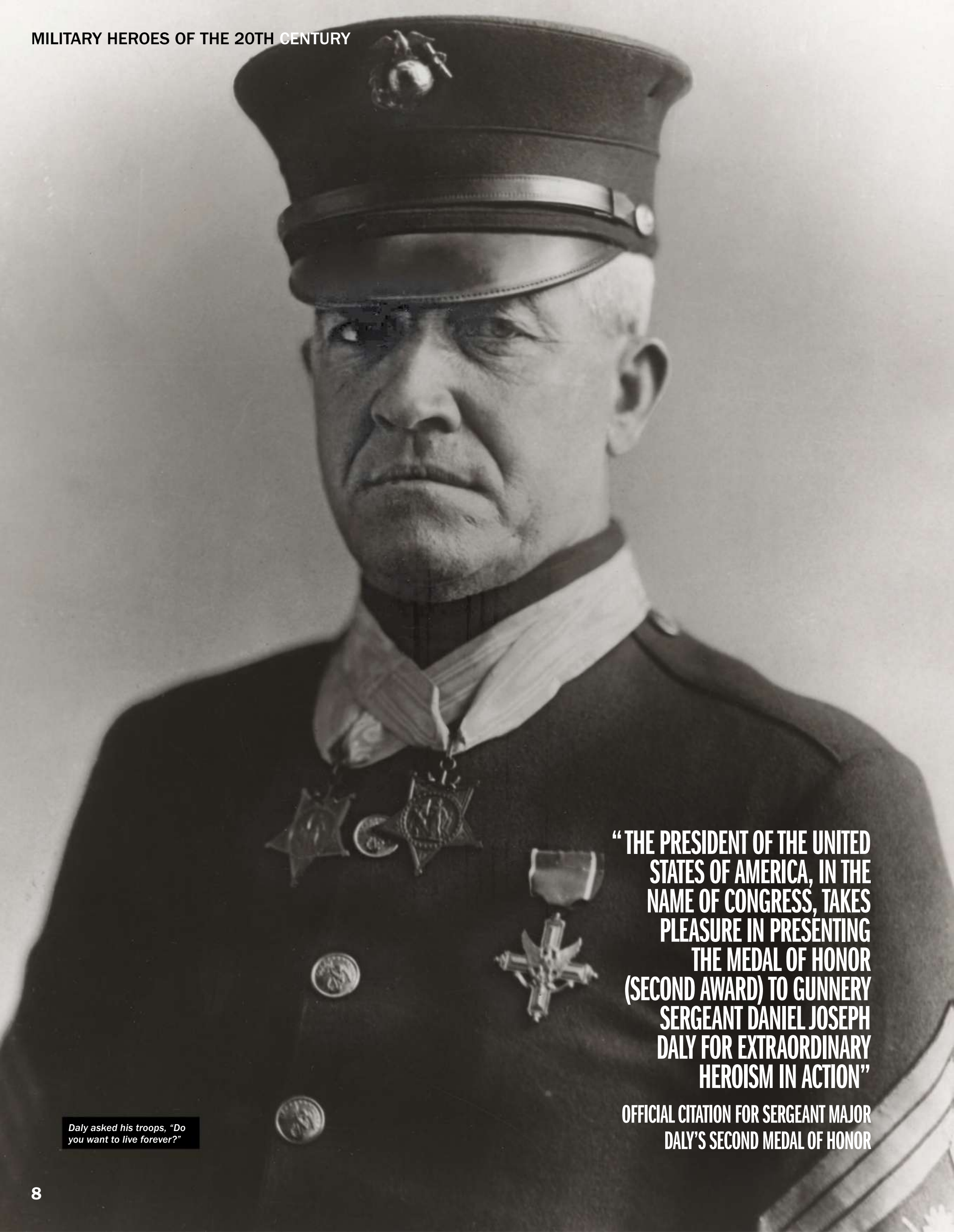


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**“THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, IN THE NAME OF CONGRESS, TAKES PLEASURE IN PRESENTING THE MEDAL OF HONOR (SECOND AWARD) TO GUNNERY SERGEANT DANIEL JOSEPH DALY FOR EXTRAORDINARY HEROISM IN ACTION”**

**OFFICIAL CITATION FOR SERGEANT MAJOR DALY’S SECOND MEDAL OF HONOR**

*Daly asked his troops, “Do you want to live forever?”*





# DANIEL DALY

## MEDAL OF HONOR (X2), DSC

A veteran of some of the bloodiest conflicts of the 20th century, Sergeant Major Daniel Daly has become a US Marine legend

**YEARS ACTIVE:** 1899-1929  
**CONFLICTS:** BOXER REBELLION, HAITI, WWI  
**RANK:** SERGEANT MAJOR

WORDS DOM RESEIGH-LINCOLN

**L**ike many individuals who would survive the much photographed and filmed wars of the burgeoning 20th century, Daniel Daly cared little for the fame or legacy his actions brought him. He was, up until his death on 27 April 1937, a man who saw medals as “foolishness,” but his actions during the Siege of International Legations in China and a bloody battle in Haiti more than a decade later have made him a legend in the annals of the US Marine Corps.

Born on 11 November 1873, Daniel Joseph Daly was raised in Glen Cove, New York. A city now, but a small village at the time, Glen Cove had blossomed from a diminutive port for English traders in the 1600s to a thriving holiday resort community for New York City residents. The young Daly, like many boys at the time, spent most of those youthful years getting into trouble. He often worked as a newsboy, before turning his fists to better use as a semi-professional boxer. Daly himself was never too open about the particulars of his childhood, but one thing was certain: his life didn't truly begin until he enlisted into the US military on 10 January 1899.

So what had brought Daly from a rough and tumble life on the streets of NYC to the US Marine Corps? The answer was simple: the Spanish-American War. When US forces intervened in the bloody Cuban War for Independence (which had remained under

Spanish control for centuries), war was declared to decide the fate of the Cuban people. Daly, hungry for the chance to see action up-front, enlisted and was shipped off to Brooklyn Navy Yard – however, the war itself lasted barely ten weeks and was over by the time Daly emerged from training.



Now a private, Daly was deployed aboard the USS Newark in May 1900. China was in the grip of the Boxer Rebellion, an anti-Christian and anti-West movement that had driven hundreds of civilians and soldiers into the Legation Quarter of Peking (now Beijing). The Boxers, supported by the ruling Qing government, laid siege to the city, so an international relief effort was organised. Daly was bound for Taku Bay, where he would meet up with the rest of the US Marines and march towards the capital.

The US Marines, along with German forces, were positioned on the Tartar Wall that surrounded the entire city. Chinese attacks eventually forced the Germans off the wall on 30 June, leaving the small contingent of Marines behind to defend it on their own. The Qing soldiers and Boxer rebels were relentless and it seemed the wall would eventually fall. On 14 August, with the wall itself in disarray, it was clear it needed to be repaired if it were to be held any longer. Daly volunteered to defend it, crawling on his own to a vantage point and using his bolt-action Lee rifle to hold back the advancing Chinese soldiers. Legends say Daly killed almost 200 enemy combatants single-handedly that day – while hearsay has likely exaggerated that number, it is believed that the real number would have still been quite considerable.

His actions didn't go unnoticed by his superiors and he was rewarded with the most prestigious honour the US military could bestow





# RECON AT FORT DIPITIE

## 24 OCTOBER 1915

HAITIAN REBELS UNLEASHED AN AMBUSH IN THE MIDDLE OF DALY'S LIGHTLY ARMED RECONNAISSANCE MISSION

### 02 RETREATING TO HIGHER GROUND

Daly, Butler and the rest of the Marines (one of who is now wounded) retreat back to higher ground, leaving all their dead horses and the one machine gun they had brought with them behind. They hunker down and attempt to hold off the advancing rebels.

### 05 COUNTERING THE ATTACK

With Daly and the machine gun back among the Marines, Butler orders a counter-attack. The Marines split into three groups, driving the cacos back towards the Grand Riviere. About 75 rebels are killed by the end of the battle with Daly, Butler and the Marines going on to overrun Fort Dipitie.

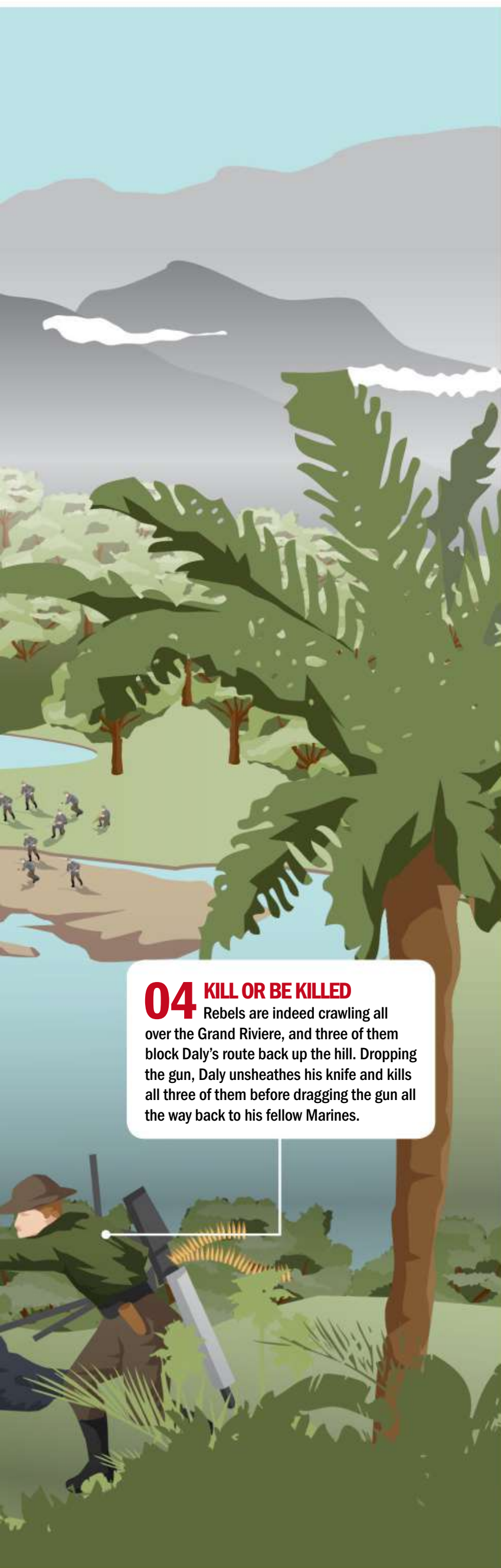
### 01 SCOUT AND AMBUSH

Under the command of Major Butler, Daly and about 40 other Marines depart from the nearby Fort Liberte with the intention of scouting out and potentially overrunning the Haitian-controlled Fort Dipitie. However, 400 cacos rebels are patrolling the web of rivers in between and trap the marines in an ambush.

### 03 RETURNING TO THE AMBUSH

With Butler and the other Marines fighting off the rebels, Daly leaves the embankment on his own and sneaks back to the site of the original attack. He cuts the straps holding the machine gun to the dead horse and hoists it on his back, knowing the road back will be littered with rebels.





## 04 KILL OR BE KILLED

Rebels are indeed crawling all over the Grand Riviere, and three of them block Daly's route back up the hill. Dropping the gun, Daly unsheathes his knife and kills all three of them before dragging the gun all the way back to his fellow Marines.

– the Medal of Honor – in 1901. His second commendation for the medal came 15 years later as he and his fellow Marines stared into the jaws of death during the US invasion and occupation of Haiti.

Between 1911 and 1915, the government of Haiti changed a staggering six times, all of which had been facilitated by coups by 'cacos' (separatist rebels based in the mountains to the north of Haiti). The US government had also become concerned with the influence that Germany was having over the region, helping accelerate certain coups in order to gain valuable trade agreements.

## "HE WAS SAID TO HAVE UTTERED THE ICONIC LINE: 'COME ON, YOU SONS OF BITCHES, DO YOU WANT TO LIVE FOREVER?'"

By 1915, the country was in a state of perpetual chaos – in response, the Haitian-American Convention was ratified (which saw the last remnants of the pro-US Haiti government handing over de facto security of the country to the US).

Now a gunnery sergeant, Daly was well into his second decade of military service when the call to sail to Haiti was green-lit. The United States was to occupy the country and restore order, but it wouldn't be an easy task – the same cacos that had reformed the government by force so many times in the past weren't going to stand idly by while US forces 'invaded' their homeland.

By 24 October 1915, the attempts to restabilise the Dominican Republic's neighbour continued to struggle as the Haitian rebels fought the US forces at every turn. Gunnery Sergeant Daly was now stationed at a military outpost known as Fort Liberte under the command of future Medal of Honor-awardee Marine Major Smedley Butler. Smedley planned to scout out and destroy a nearby Haitian outpost, Fort Dipitie, which was separated from Liberte by a web of small rivers known as the Grand Riviere. A group of about 40 Marines, including Daly, were tasked with crossing the rivers to conduct reconnaissance with a set of horses and a single machine gun.

However, the rebels were already guarding the Grand Riviere and the 400-strong contingent of cacos soldiers unleashed their ambush in the middle of their mission. The location itself was a bowl of sorts with the rebels holding higher ground. Daly and the other men returned fire, but the rebels had the advantage. However, one of the Marines had been injured and the machine gun had been lost, the horse beneath shot dead by a rebel bullet. The Marines pulled back to higher

ground and hunkered down, returning fire at the approaching rebels.

The cacos attacked again a few hours later, intending to slaughter the Marines before they could return to the safety of Fort Liberte. As the cacos continued to blanket the Marines with fire, Daly once again volunteered to do the near impossible: recover the lost machine gun. Without it, the Marines wouldn't survive. In other words, if the rebels didn't shred the Americans with bullets, their bayonets would make short work of them at close range.

Daly, still under fire from the rebels, snuck away towards the site of the original ambush

while his fellow Marines continued to hold the Haitians back. He then cut the machine gun from the back of the dead horse, heaved it onto his back and carried it single-handedly back to the battle. On his way, he was attacked by three rebels, but Daly wasn't going to go down without a fight – he killed every last one with nothing but a knife before making his way back. With the machine gun set up in their position, Daly and the Marines were able to drive back the rebels.

With the machine gun making all the difference, Major Butler ordered a counter-attack at first light on 25 October. The Marines,

sensing the changing tide, charged the group, splitting into three groups and attacking the retreating rebels. A total of 75 cacos were killed by the end of the battle, and the collapse of the attack eventually led to the fall of Fort Dipitie and a victory during the Battle of the Grand Riviere that followed.

Daly would go onto play an equally vital role in World War I – his actions against the Germans during the Battle of Belleau Wood in 1918 once again inciting devotion in his men. He was said to have uttered the iconic line: "Come on, you sons of bitches, do

you want to live forever?" While Daly himself insisted that he actually shouted "for Christ's sake men, come on! Do you want to live forever?" the phrase became something of a mantra for the US Marine Corps.

Daly was soon awarded his second Medal of Honor for his valour in Haiti and the Distinguished Service Cross for his courage in France in 1918. By the end of his military career in 1929, Daly had become one of the most decorated soldiers in US military history and a legend in the long timeline of the US Marine Corps.



Sergeant Major Smedley Butler, Daly's superior during the Battle of Fort Dipitie, was also awarded a Medal of Honor for his actions in the operation



William Leefe Robinson pictured around 1916. He was the first person to shoot down an airship over British skies

**“HIS MAJESTY THE KING HAS BEEN GRACIOUSLY PLEASED TO AWARD THE VICTORIA CROSS TO THE UNDERMENTIONED OFFICER FOR MOST CONSPICUOUS BRAVERY. HE ATTACKED AN ENEMY AIRSHIP UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES OF GREAT DIFFICULTY AND DANGER, AND SENT IT CRASHING TO THE GROUND AS A FLAMING WRECK”**

**VICTORIA CROSS CITATION,  
LONDON GAZETTE, 5 SEPTEMBER**





# WILLIAM LEEFE ROBINSON

## VICTORIA CROSS

Britain's war-weary population was given a night to remember when an RFC airman shot down a German airship over Hertfordshire in 1916. The 21-year-old pilot became a national sensation and epitomised the glamour of Britain's early airmen

**YEARS ACTIVE:** 1914-1918  
**CONFLICTS:** WORLD WAR I  
**RANK:** CAPTAIN

WORDS BETH WYATT

In the early hours of 3 September 1916, the villagers of Cuffley, Hertfordshire, gathered for an unexpected spectacle. A German airship had been shot out of the sky, and an inferno had quickly taken its place. 16 men lay dead inside, but for the villagers this was a scene of unabashed celebration – at last one of the feared German Zeppelins (as they believed the airship to be) had been shot down by Britain's valiant defenders, the pilots of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). This night would not only be imprinted on those who watched it unfold, but also on the man responsible for the jubilation. William Leefe Robinson – a humble, young pilot serving in 39 Squadron – was transformed into a national treasure overnight after becoming the first person to shoot down an enemy airship over Britain. For this incredible feat he was awarded the Victoria Cross – the fastest to have ever been issued.

Robinson was not a man preordained to achieve glory in the skies. The Royal Military College, Sandhurst graduate's Great War

service began as a second lieutenant with the 5th Militia Battalion, the Worcestershire Regiment. But he soon became restless, with his role centering on preparing soldiers for the front. Raymond Laurence Rimell, a biographer of Robinson, argued that, "There seems little reason to suppose that Robinson had any great ambition for flying, the subject was never raised in correspondence, more likely the tedium of his position was such that he fired off as many applications as possible and took the first one offered him". On 29 March 1915, Robinson commenced his new career as an observer with 4 Squadron of the RFC. Six months later, on 18 September, he was promoted to flying officer, having earned his wings after a spell of recuperation in England due to a shrapnel wound received in France.

On the night of 2 September 1916, Robinson was on duty at Sutton's Farm airfield, Hornchurch, Essex, where he was stationed with 39 Squadron. *The Times*, recalling the extraordinary events of 2 September in the issue of 11 April 1917, wrote that the pilot

"was attached to various stations in England for night flying, and before the exploit for which the King awarded him the V.C. had been up on every occasion of a raid in the neighbourhood of London for a period of seven months."

The warning on 2 September that an enemy raid over Britain was imminent came through before 5pm. The Germans' choice of evening proved off the mark: grey skies and fierce winds frosted the hulls of the 12 navy and four army airships and some were forced to return home. Only Hauptmann Wilhelm Schramm's Schütte-Lanz S.L.11 managed to reach within 11 kilometres (seven miles) of Charing Cross.

Robinson's Home Defence squadron began its defence of the capital just after 11pm. Robinson's patrol was between Hornchurch and Joyce Green, Kent. His first encounter of the night with an enemy airship was not with the ill-fated Schütte-Lanz SL11 (incorrectly labeled as a Zeppelin after the events), but with the Zeppelin L.Z.98, which had been dropping bombs in the Kent area. But Robinson was not in luck with this first sighting. He later wrote, "I



very slowly gained on it for about ten minutes – I judged it to be about 800 feet (245 metres) below me, and I sacrificed my speed in order to keep the height. It went behind some clouds, avoided the searchlights and I lost sight of it...”

If Robinson had kept to his given patrol time, which had ended by this point, he would never have received the Victoria Cross (at least not in these circumstances). But on he continued, towards London, reasoning that the city’s searchlights could assist him.

While the 21-year-old was patrolling in his B.E.2c plane, north London had become a target for Schramm’s S.L.11. The commander released a succession of high-explosive bombs, but his aircraft was caught by searchlights in Finsbury and Victoria Park as it hovered above Alexandra Palace. Crowds of thousands watched in anticipation as the Finsbury anti-aircraft guns began to fire.

Robinson was one of three 39 Squadron pilots to clock the airship – along with Second Lieutenants Mackay and Hunt. However, it

### “ROBINSON’S COMBINATION OF THE POPULAR LEWIS GUN AND INCENDIARY BULLETS SUCCEEDED”

was Robinson who successfully gave chase. Schramm’s airship vanished into clouds after turning over Tottenham, but to Robinson’s advantage the S.L.11 was closer by when it reappeared. In his report of the night, the pilot wrote, “I flew about 800 feet (245 metres) below it from bow to stern and distributed one drum along it (alternate New Brock and Pomeroy). It seemed to have no effect; I therefore moved to one side and gave it another drum distributed along its side – without apparent effect. I then got behind it (by this time I was very close – 500 feet or less below) and concentrated one drum on one part (underneath rear). I was then at a height of 11,500 feet (3,505 metres) when attacking the Zeppelin.

“I hardly finished the drum before I saw the part fired at glow. In a few seconds the whole rear part was blazing. When the third drum was fired there were no searchlights on the Zeppelin and no anti-aircraft was firing. I quickly got out of the way of the falling, blazing Zeppelin and being very excited fired off a few red Very’s lights and dropped a parachute flare.”

Robinson’s combination of the popular Lewis gun and incendiary bullets succeeded when he concentrated his fire, and the fiery husk of the airship crashed into a field in Cuffley, Hertfordshire at about 2.20am on 3 September. The entire crew of 16 perished.

Living under the strain of two years of war, the public needed the morale boost Robinson’s

*The scene over Cuffley, Hertfordshire, as spotlights hunt for airships*

*A British propaganda postcard depicting the demise of Schütte-Lanz S.L.11 over Cuffley*





actions gave them. Thousands left their homes in the middle of the night to watch their new hero as the searchlights illuminated his chase.

Aviation historian Richard C Smith wrote of the spectacle, in his book *Hornchurch, Streets Of Heroes*: “The scene was witnessed by thousands of people within London and the surrounding areas; they cheered and sang as the airship descended in flames.”

Despite the aircraft being the Schütte-Lanz S.L.11, the authorities referred to it as a Zeppelin L.21 – potentially, as the RAF Museum has suggested, to “prevent public confusion” between the different aircraft. The Schütte-Lanz was wooden-framed compared to the duralumin metal Zeppelin.

Huge crowds visited the scene of the wreckage in the subsequent days. *The Times*, on 5 September, estimated that 10,000 people so far had turned up at the site. Souvenir hunters quickly descended on the site, and their spoils would turn up at community exhibitions and other occasions over the following months. Robinson – whose actions had punctured the image of the invincible German airship – experienced a surreal 48 hours following the events; within that time he was presented with the Victoria Cross by King

George V at Windsor Castle – the fastest VC to ever be issued. The pilot was approached by members of the public en masse in the street, given standing ovations in theatres and sent mail by his adoring fans, in the form of photos from actresses and letters from schoolgirls, as the Imperial War Museum’s research has found. The pilot also received monetary awards from individuals and companies who had promised to reward the first airman to bring down a Zeppelin over Britain. A modest man, Robinson was somewhat embarrassed by the

several unsuccessful escape attempts. By the time he returned home in December 1918 to his loved ones, including his fiancée Joan Whipple, Captain Robinson was a changed man, frail from the punishments he had suffered. To the heartbreak of the nation, he succumbed to the ‘Spanish Influenza’ epidemic on 31 December 1918, aged just 23.

The legacy of the people’s pilot lived on in the minds of those who had celebrated his achievements, and also in the form of tangible memorials. As reported in *The Times*

## “CAPTAIN ROBINSON WAS A CHANGED MAN, FRAIL FROM THE PUNISHMENTS HE HAD SUFFERED AS A PRISONER OF WAR”

attention and, it seems, desperate to be sent to the front. The authorities capitulated, and he travelled to France on 17 March 1917.

On 5 April, Robinson’s squadron was attacked over Douai, northern France, by the ‘Red Baron’ Manfred von Richthofen and his men. Robinson was captured and spent the remainder of the war in prisoner of war camps. He was particularly harshly treated due to his status as the destroyer of S.L.11, and he made

on 10 June 1921, the Cuffley field in which his almost-mythic status was forged became home to a granite obelisk in his memory, with the funds raised by readers of the *Daily Express*. At the unveiling, the newspaper’s editor RD Blumenfeld expressed the admiration and gratitude they felt towards Robinson, describing the obelisk as “a spontaneous tribute to the heroism of a national figure, whose name shall live for ever”.



The wreckage of the Schütte-Lanz S.L.11 that was shot down on 3 September 1916

Images: Alamy, Getty



# LAND FIT FOR THE FALLEN



Millions make pilgrimages to the beautifully kept Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries, the last resting place of thousands of young men. Yet without one man's vision and determination, these dignified and noble places might never have existed

WORDS TINA EDISS

**T**he battlefields of World War I are now dotted with cemeteries – places of serenity rather than slaughter. White headstones line up like soldiers on parade, the parade ground a still and silent place of reflection and remembrance. On a summer's day, the shadow of an English rose will fall on every stone.

The existence of these sites owes a lasting debt to one man who was determined that the

great sacrifice of these soldiers would never be forgotten. Born in Bristol in 1869, Fabian Arthur Goulstone Ware was 45 when war broke out and was considered too old to fight.

A former teacher, schools administrator and newspaper editor, he was put in charge of the Red Cross mobile units to search and care for the wounded. As he travelled he came across many hasty burials in fields, in farms, in woods, even in gardens. He became troubled about the

THEIR NAMES  
FOR EVER





*The CWGC's memorials offer a lasting place to honour and remember the fallen. The largest is Tyne Cot, Belgium, pictured here*

lack of an organisation responsible for keeping records of these burials.

Saddened by the scale of the loss and deeply concerned about the future of these forsaken graves, he began to seek out burial places and keep precise records of the names and locations. "Ware had this extraordinary vision," explains Victoria Wallace, Director General of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC). "I suppose as a journalist he was a great questioner and perhaps, by nature, slightly suspicious of government. He was furiously independent and had great vision and extraordinary drive. This was a man who could quite easily have done nothing in the war. But he went to the battlefields, mustering cars to support the Red Cross. He then realised there was a great problem in what they could do with the war dead."

In October 1914 Ware was visiting some well-marked but unrecorded war burials in Bethune Town Cemetery with Red Cross assessor Lieutenant Colonel Stewart. It was here the idea of an organisation that would record, look after and maintain the graves was born.

Well connected, Ware persuaded the War Office that a department should be set up to deal with the ever-increasing toll. The task was

given to Ware and the Graves Registration Commission was formed in March 1915.

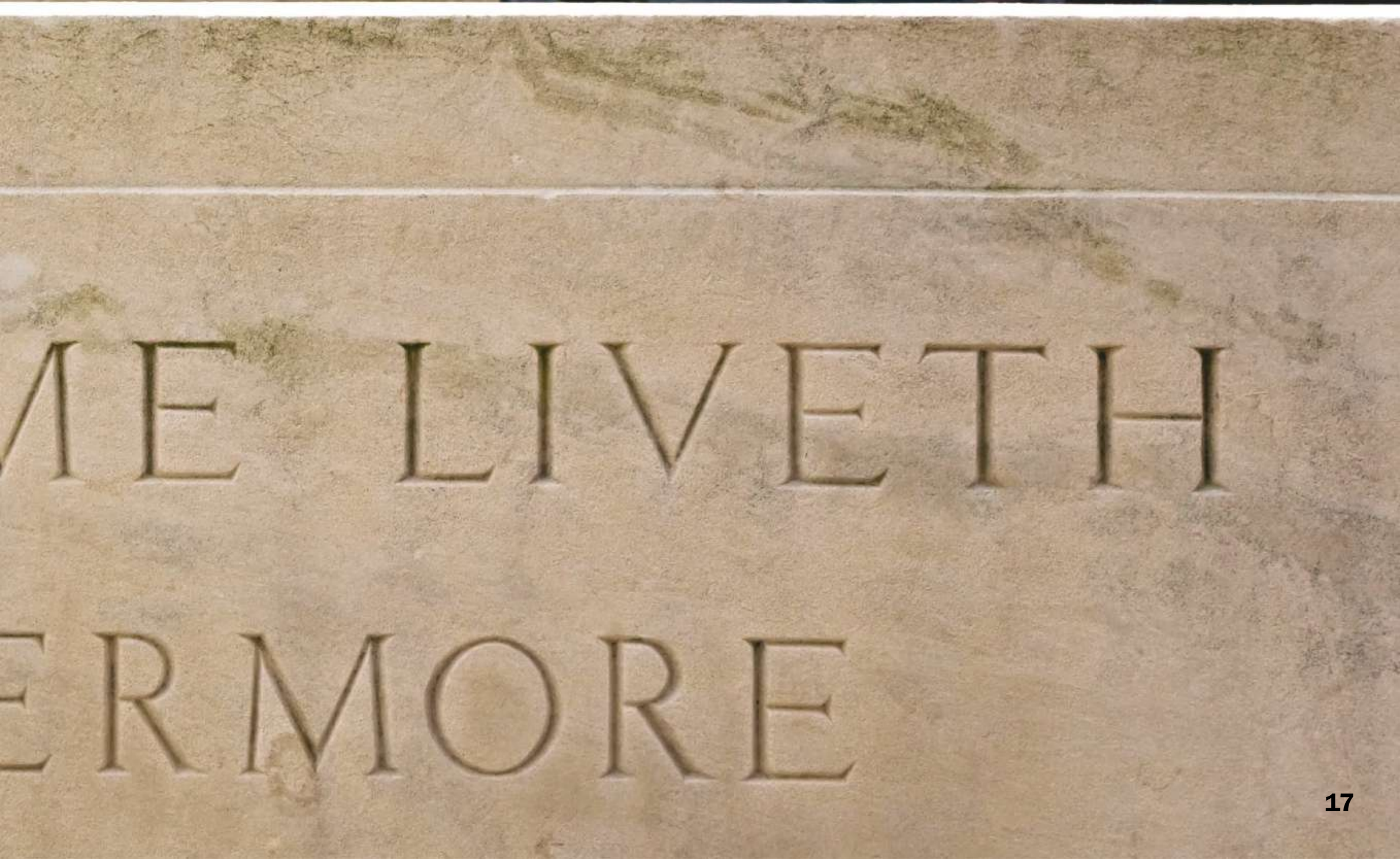
The land held by the Allies was divided into sections for teams to search: every grave was to be marked. Hastily constructed crosses with fading details were replaced with sturdier versions with more permanent inscriptions.

The teams would make endless enquires: Ware had good contacts among French officials and churchmen. However, the best information would often come from local children, who would lead them across muddy fields to lonely corners and lost burials.

Diligently they searched for clues: buttons perhaps or initials on rusty spoons, numbers on ground sheets, inscriptions on watches, even the shade of khaki issued by various units provided valuable information. All helped give an identity back to the lost. Taking great risks, the men began identifying the fallen, even working in danger in the frontline trenches.

In March 1915 General Haig commented, "It is fully recognised that the work of the organisation is of purely sentimental value, and that it does not directly contribute to the successful termination of the war. It has, however, extraordinary moral value to the troops in the field as well as to the relatives and friends

**"IT WAS HERE THE IDEA OF AN ORGANISATION THAT WOULD RECORD, LOOK AFTER AND MAINTAIN THE GRAVES WAS BORN"**





of the dead at home. The mere fact that these officers visit day after day the cemeteries close behind the trenches, fully exposed to shell and rifle fire, to accurately record not only the names of the dead but also the exact place of burial, has a symbolic value to the men that it would be difficult to exaggerate."

As the war neared its conclusion, Ware's concern for the graves grew. Determined, he campaigned for an organisation, feeling it should be imperial rather than national, as the soldiers had come from all over the world. Finally in May 1917 the Imperial War Graves Commission (now known as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission) was set up. Edward, Prince of Wales was president, with Ware as vice chairman.

Ware's ideals were ahead of his time. Life in the trenches had been horrific, and the experience led to a strong feeling of brotherhood among the men, and Ware felt this spirit should be continued in death.

He asked Sir Frederic Kenyon, director of the British Museum, to put together a report setting out the commission's principles, which are still held today: each of the dead would be commemorated by name on permanent headstones or memorials; headstones would be uniform, and there would be no distinction made on account of military or civil rank, race or creed; there would be no repatriation of remains, as it was something only the wealthy could afford.

This led to huge disagreements, as grieving relatives wanted to choose headstones for their loved ones. Many wanted a cross rather than a headstone and wished to use their own wording. Others wanted to build private memorials. In some circles, the commission's attitude was seen as tyrannical.

"There was massive public opposition to the approach and it continued to be debated in parliament until 1920," said Victoria. "It was an extraordinarily difficult thing. I don't think there was a general expectation at the time of remains being repatriated. For the government it would have been an impossibility in terms of both morale and practicalities."

The debate came to a conclusion in May 1920. Winston Churchill and MP William Burdett-Coutts spoke eloquently for the commission and finally convinced the opposition that the memorials would commemorate the nation's huge loss in perpetuity. Work on the cemeteries as we know them today could begin.

Funding was to come – and still does – from the governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India and the UK. The amounts are proportionate to the number of graves. At the time no one had any real idea of how much it would cost. Between 1919-1920 the cost was £243,577 18s 11d. In 2015 to 2016 the CWGC received over £61 million.

The cemeteries were to be dignified, respectful places, but never gloomy. Each would have an altar – the Stone of Remembrance – and a huge cross – the Sword of Sacrifice.

"Ware's vision was to pull the great thinkers of the time and some of the greatest minds in the cultural heritage sphere and use their combined creative genius to come up with something that had such a quality and such a compelling overall vision," Victoria explained.

Sir Edwin Lutyens, Sir Herbert Baker and Sir Reginald Blomfield – famous architects of the time – set to work designing the cemeteries. Rudyard Kipling, who had lost his son in the war, was to be the wordsmith. He chose the inscriptions, "Their Names Liveth for Evermore", while the graves of those buried without a name read, "A Soldier of the Great War, Known unto God". The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew was consulted. Plants were chosen that would bloom for every season – an English country garden in a foreign field.

By the time World War I ended, the landscape looked like the world itself had died. Few trees were left standing, and the land was in chaos: a dismal, muddy wilderness cut with trenches and scarred with craters. It was vicious with rusting barbed wire and deadly with unexploded shells. Roads had been pulverised, bridges broken, railways obliterated, villages reduced to ruins – and the dead lay everywhere.

A labour corps was established to deal with the work. Using Ware's records, isolated graves and small cemeteries could be incorporated into larger ones. Earlier cemeteries, battered by bombardments, were set in order.

The commission hired gardeners – at first ex-soldiers – who cleared and prepared the land to be fit for fallen heroes. Much of the work was carried out by units nicknamed 'mobile gardening parties'. Lorries were loaded with tents, tools, provisions and plants, and the teams set off into the muddy wasteland for days on end. Life was tough and dangerous: work included clearing unexploded bombs from sites selected as cemeteries. Conditions were primitive, and food and provisions were hard to come by.

At first the graves were marked with wooden crosses that were eventually replaced by headstones made from Portland stone. Each was engraved with the regimental badge, name, rank and date of death. For a fee the next of kin could add a short inscription; a contribution that soon became voluntary.

Three experimental cemeteries were built: of those, Forceville in the Somme region became the template. A walled cemetery within a garden setting, it was said by those who first saw it to be noble, classically beautiful and stirring.

So what would have happened to the war dead without Fabian Ware? In previous wars the rank and file were buried in mass pits, while officers' remains were often sent home.



*A soldier assembles wooden grave markers for fallen soldiers. Eventually the wooden markers were replaced with headstones*



**"THE COMMISSION HIRED GARDENERS – AT FIRST EX-SOLDIERS – WHO CLEARED AND PREPARED THE LAND TO BE FIT FOR FALLEN HEROES. MUCH OF THE WORK WAS CARRIED OUT BY UNITS NICKNAMED MOBILE GARDENING PARTIES"**





*Victoria Wallace visiting the Pozieres British war memorial in Amiens, France with then-French president Francois Hollande and then-British prime minister David Cameron in March 2016*



*Members of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps tending and maintaining British war graves in 1917*



CWGC war graves and memorials can be found in 150 countries worldwide. The one pictured lies in Baghdad, Iraq







**“THE LARGEST CEMETERY IS TYNE COT IN BELGIUM. IT IS THE SITE OF 12,000 GRAVES – THE DEAD FROM THE BATTLES FOR PASSCHENDAELE – AND IS CONVERSATION-STOPPING”**

“Inevitably they would have found some way of sorting everything out,” said Victoria. “Somebody would have done something. I suspect it would have ended up staying within the army rather than becoming an independent organisation. I suspect it would have been done in a rather more workman-like way.”

After the war, Ware gave reasons behind his drive and determination. He said, “Common remembrance of the dead [of the Great War] is the one thing, sometimes the only thing, that never fails to bring our people together.”

The work took 20 years to complete. The final memorials were finished in 1938, just one year before the outbreak of World War II. There are now cemeteries and memorials in more than 150 countries, where 1.7 million service men and women who died in the two world wars are buried. The youngest was 14 years old, the oldest was 67. The largest cemetery is Tyne Cot in Belgium. It is the site of 12,000 graves – the dead from the battles for Passchendaele – and is conversation-stopping. The smallest cemetery is on Ocracoke Island, North Carolina in the USA, where four World War II British sailors are buried.

Big or small, it’s impossible to say which is the saddest, but perhaps the most heartbreaking are those that are tucked away where few footsteps fall. At Faffemont (Falfemont) Farm on the Somme there is the grave of three men from the London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers) killed on 10 September 1916. They are buried in a farmer’s field where they fell. There is no path, and when the crops are high, the graves are hidden from view.

Soldiers who have no known grave are named on memorials to the missing. The biggest is Thiepval, which stands 45 metres high and lists over 70,000 men lost on the Somme. In Ypres there are over 54,000 names inscribed on the Menin Gate. Each evening at 8pm crowds gather for the Last Post Ceremony which has been held here every day since 1928, except for an interlude during World War II.

When the killing of World War II began the commission was ready for the sad but vital role it had to play. When the fighting was over, 559 new cemeteries and 36 new memorials were added to the list.

So did Ware’s vision become a reality? Would people always remember? The CWGC now maintains war graves at 23,000 locations in 150 countries around the world so it’s impossible to know exactly how many people visit.

“Our best guess is around ten million visitors a year,” said Victoria. “We know for a fact that there are at least 500,000 a year who go to Tyne Cot and around 350,000 who go to Thiepval.”

Ten million annual visitors is an incredible figure. Would Ware be surprised at the huge numbers who still come to pay their respects, 100 years on? “I don’t think he would be surprised at all,” said Victoria confidently. “He took a view that this was something that was absolutely there for posterity. I think his vision was very much that this was something that future generations should continue – and would continue – to honour.”

Today visitors stand on grass as soft as velvet and admire the plants tended by the commission’s 850 gardeners. They read the names and sigh at the sacrifice of a generation



## THE COMMITMENT CONTINUES OVER 100 YEARS ON

**AT 11AM ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2017 A CEREMONIAL BURIAL TOOK PLACE FOR 19 UNIDENTIFIED WORLD WAR I SOLDIERS AT THE CWGC’S NEW IRISH FARM CEMETERY TO THE NORTH EAST OF YPRES**

A total of 22 bodies were uncovered during ground work at an industrial building site at Briekestraat, Ypres. The site was a wartime cemetery that was moved to another site just 300 metres away – but somehow these men were missed.

The men are among the many sets of remains still being recovered each year. They are found during building or road works or by farmers working the land.

“We recover possibly one a week,” said Victoria. “At the beginning of the summer we had about 110 bodies in the recovery units in France and Belgium, and we will probably end up with that number at the end of the year, even though we are still re-burying steadily. When you think there are 200,000 people listed on the walls of the Memorials to the Missing, just on the Western Front, I suppose it’s not altogether surprising.”

The identification process has changed considerably through the years, although it still requires a large degree of detective work to give the dead back their names.

“Sometimes it is impossible, especially when bodies are found with no historical context. It’s particularly sad if souvenir hunters have removed things like the insignia – then it becomes incredibly difficult to work out what nationality the person was.”

If the nationality of the person can be established, the next step is to find out when they might have been lost.

“Then you’ve got a chance to narrow it down,” explained Victoria, “because you’ve got the regimental rolls, and you know who went missing around that time and around that point. It’s only when you get to that point that you can say, OK, that’s probably someone from, for example, the York and Lancashire Regiment, because they were there on that date. Let’s have a look and see who was missing and who was never recovered. Then you end up with a handful of people – and then you can start to go down the route of calling for potential relatives and see whether DNA profiling is possible.”

The task of identification rests with the relevant government. In the case of these 19 men, it was the UK Ministry of Defence and their dedicated unit called the JCCC – the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre.

Of the 19 British soldiers, four served with the Essex Regiment, one with the Monmouthshire Regiment, one with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, one with the Northumberland Regiment and one with the Royal Irish Regiment. The final 11 were ‘Known Unto God’.

“They were originally going to be burying all 22 men,” added Victoria, “But actually there’s quite a strong chance we may be able to make identification so we are holding off on that.”

These burials were the last of 2017 as winter weather makes interments during the cold months impractical. In the spring of every year, over a century after the Great War ended, the CWGC’s work to bury the dead of World War I begins again.

and feel anger at such waste. Many feel consoled by the care still given to the brave young men whose names will live forever thanks to the efforts of Fabian Ware.

Twice mentioned in dispatches and knighted in 1920, Sir Major General Fabian Ware died aged 79 on 29 April 1949 at his home in Amberley, Gloucestershire. He is buried in the Holy Trinity Churchyard, where his white Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone will always be cared for by the organisation he worked so hard to create.



# WILFRED OWEN

## THE FINAL LINE, 1918

WORDS GRACE FREEMAN

One of the war's most celebrated writers was tragically killed just a week before the end of the war

**I** came out in order to help these boys," wrote Wilfred Owen to his mother, Susan Owen, in a letter dated September 1917, "directly, by leading them as well as an officer can; indirectly, by watching their sufferings that I may speak of them as well as a pleader can. I have done the first." Widely regarded as the greatest war poet – and one of the finest of the 20th century – Owen was as focused and as skilled a soldier as he was a bard, his bravery charged by his desire to protect his fellow men of the Manchester Regiment.

In the autumn of 1917 he spent a short period of convalescence at Craiglockhart War

Hospital, where he was treated for shellshock following action at Savy Wood near Saint-Quentin, before returning to the frontline in August 1918 for the final few months of his young life – despite the opportunity to remain on home duty. Siegfried Sassoon, Owen's friend and a fellow poet, had appealed to him otherwise, but Owen was adamant and dutiful in continuing to declare the horrors of the war. "I am much gladder to be going out again than afraid. I shall be able to cry my outcry; playing my part."

By the time Owen arrived back in France, the 1918 Spring

**Right:** Wilfred Owen, pictured around 1916, was a brave soldier who felt a strong sense of duty to his comrades

**Left:** Wilfred Owen's gravestone. It features the inscription, "Shall life renew these bodies? Of a truth all death will he annul", chosen by his mother from Owen's poem 'The End'



Image: Getty



Offensive, a series of German attacks that had begun in April, was almost over, and the Allies had launched the Hundred Days Offensive, starting with the Battle of Amiens, which would quickly reclaim all the ground captured by the German army and the eventual disintegration of the Hindenburg Line.

The 2nd Manchesters had by now been withdrawn twice and were positioned at the town of Corbie. Owen, who had been posted to Amiens, reported to the regimental adjutant about their proximity and was subsequently appointed as the bombing officer to D Company, despite having no special knowledge of the weapons.

Around this time, Owen drafted the poem *Smile, Smile, Smile* and, over a year after he had first begun it, finally completed *The Sentry*, whose origins were folded in the furrows of Beaumont Hamel, in the Somme, in early 1917, when a shell bombardment had resulted in a young sentinel being blinded.

**“WE DREDGED HIM UP, FOR KILLED,  
UNTIL HE WHINED “O SIR, MY EYES  
– I’M BLIND – I’M BLIND, I’M BLIND!”**

Towards the end of the month, the regiment, along with the rest of the 96th Brigade, journeyed southeast to Vendelles, further east along to Bellenglise, which had only just been recaptured by the Allies, then a little further east still, to the small village of Magny-la-Fosse. As they moved into position in the hamlet, they came under fire from the Germans; two men were killed and over 20 were wounded.

On the evening of 30 September, the 96th Brigade advanced to Joncourt, with D Company of the 2nd Manchesters marching in front. The attack was fiercely fought over the next two nights, and the ground was successfully

held. Following the push and “for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty” Owen was recommended for the Military Cross and was, posthumously, awarded it.

One of the fatalities at Joncourt was Private Jones, Owen’s servant, who had been with the soldier-poet since 1917 and who, he wrote to Sassoon, was “shot through the head [and] lay on top of me, soaking my shoulder, for half an hour”. On 3 October, the men retreated into dugouts along the Saint-Quentin Canal, where they came under German fire and lost over 20 men, with 70 injured. Two days later, they journeyed west to Hancourt – a ruined village, previously held by the Germans – and stayed there for a short while, in order to get some rest and to recover.

Owen was still in command of D Company of the 2nd Manchesters, and towards the middle of October, they began their steady journey back to the frontline, passing through Busigny, before reaching Saint-Souplet, where the American army was forcing a German retreat; this gradual deconstruction of the Hindenburg Line – which had begun in August, as Wilfred Owen returned to France – would subsequently

become known as the Allies’ final ‘advance to victory’ in the war.

On the last evening of October in 1918, Owen penned a letter home – his last – to his mother, from the smoky cellar of the Forester’s House in Ors.

**“OF THIS I AM CERTAIN: YOU COULD NOT  
BE VISITED BY A BAND OF FRIENDS HALF  
SO FINE AS SURROUND ME HERE”**

The night of 3 November was chosen for the 96th Brigade to cross the Sambre-Oise Canal, to assault the Germans that were situated on the opposite bank. On 4 November 1918, at 5.45am, the shrill whistle blew and Wilfred Owen led the soldiers closer to the towpath, and five minutes later they scrambled up towards the muddy bank of the canal. On the other side was a relentless barrage of German bullets, which were returned by the 2nd Manchesters and surrounding regiments as they attempted to make it over the canal with a makeshift bridge of wooden floats. Among the wreckage walked Owen, shouting words of encouragement to his men. Lieutenant Foulkes, a comrade who was wounded during the same attack, later said that Owen was last seen trying to get across the water on a temporary raft.

By noon that day, the surviving soldiers of the regiment had successfully traversed the Sambre-Oise Canal, and a mere seven days later the groans and the gunfire of the battlefields ceased for the final time. In Shrewsbury, where Owen’s family lived, the bells of the Armistice were ringing as the telegram announcing his death, at the age of 25, arrived. Wilfred Owen lies in Ors Communal Cemetery, alongside others who were killed that same day.

*Ors Communal Cemetery in France is Wilfred Owen’s final resting place, along with dozens of others who died just days before the end of the war*

**“OWEN WAS AS FOCUSED  
AND AS SKILLED A SOLDIER  
AS HE WAS A BARD, HIS  
BRAVERY CHARGED BY  
HIS DESIRE TO PROTECT  
HIS FELLOW MEN OF THE  
MANCHESTER REGIMENT”**





*The captain and lance corporal distinguished themselves by both earning the VC during the same action*



**“CAPT. FRISBY REALISED  
AT ONCE THAT UNLESS THIS  
POST WAS CAPTURED THE  
WHOLE ADVANCE IN THIS  
AREA WOULD FAIL”**

**LONDON GAZETTE, 26 NOVEMBER 1918R**





# CYRIL FRISBY & THOMAS JACKSON

## VICTORIA CROSS

On 27 September 1918, both these men of the 1st Battalion, Coldstream Guards, led a lethal assault against enemy machine gun positions during the Battle of the Canal du Nord, earning the regiment two Victoria Crosses on the same day

**YEARS ACTIVE:** 1915-1918  
**CONFLICTS:** WORLD WAR I  
**RANK:** CAPTAIN (CF); LANCE CORPORAL (TJ)

WORDS MURRAY DAHM

**F**ollowing the German Spring Offensive in March 1918, the Allies launched a series of successful counterattacks from May to July 1918 that forced the Germans to fall back. These were followed by a series of Allied attacks, which have become known as the Hundred Days Offensive, beginning with the Battle of Amiens in early August. These campaigns drove the Germans out of France and contributed to bringing World War I to a successful close.

Success at Amiens was followed by attacks launched in the north at Albert, adhering to Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig's plans to avoid massive losses. The forces that were involved consisted mainly of men from Great Britain and the Commonwealth (especially Canada, Australia and New Zealand). Further successes at Mont Saint-Quentin, Bapaume and the Second Battle of the Somme followed. These attacks met determined resistance but were eventually successful, with the Allies taking the Drocourt-Quéant Line on 2 September. This was 'Wotanstellung' to the Germans, the

western edge of the formidable Hindenburg Line defences. On the night of 2 September, the Germans fell back to the Canal du Nord.

Further assaults across a wide front pushed the Germans back to the Hindenburg Line during September, at Havrincourt, Saint-Mihiel and Epehy, carried out by forces from nearly every Allied army. The Allied supreme commander Ferdinand Foch's 'Grand Offensive' on the Hindenburg Line itself began on 26 September with units from the French and American Expeditionary Forces attacking in the Meuse-Argonne, followed by Belgian, British and French troops attacking at Ypres in Flanders on 28 September.

The British Fourth Army (consisting of British, Australian and American troops) began its assault on 29 September at the Battle of Saint-Quentin Canal. The attack on the Canal du Nord was launched on 27 September by the British Third Army (consisting of troops from Britain, Canada and New Zealand), deliberately planned to occur one day after the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and a day before the Flanders

campaign so that Allied forces would not be met with huge numbers of German reserves, which could have been brought to bear against a single Allied attack.

The Canal du Nord was an incomplete canal system that stretched from the Oise River to the Dunkirk-Scheldt Canal. Its construction had begun in 1913, but the sections of the canal were in various states of completion when war broke out in 1914. This meant that in some sections the ground was difficult and boggy, while in others the incomplete canal workings created almost perfect fortifications for the defending German forces. The retreating Germans also exacerbated the challenging terrain by flooding and damming various sections, to hold up an Allied advance or force them into the fields of fire of the copious machine gun and field artillery positions they had set up to defend the line of the canal.

The Canal du Nord faced both the British Third and First Armies. The Third Army was also expected to provide support for the British Fourth Army in the assault that would launch



Some sections of the canal were impregnable, but luckily the structure was incomplete and sections such as this one near Moeuvres could be circumvented



The Germans destroyed the bridges over sections of the canal, forcing the Allies to assault their positions across difficult terrain

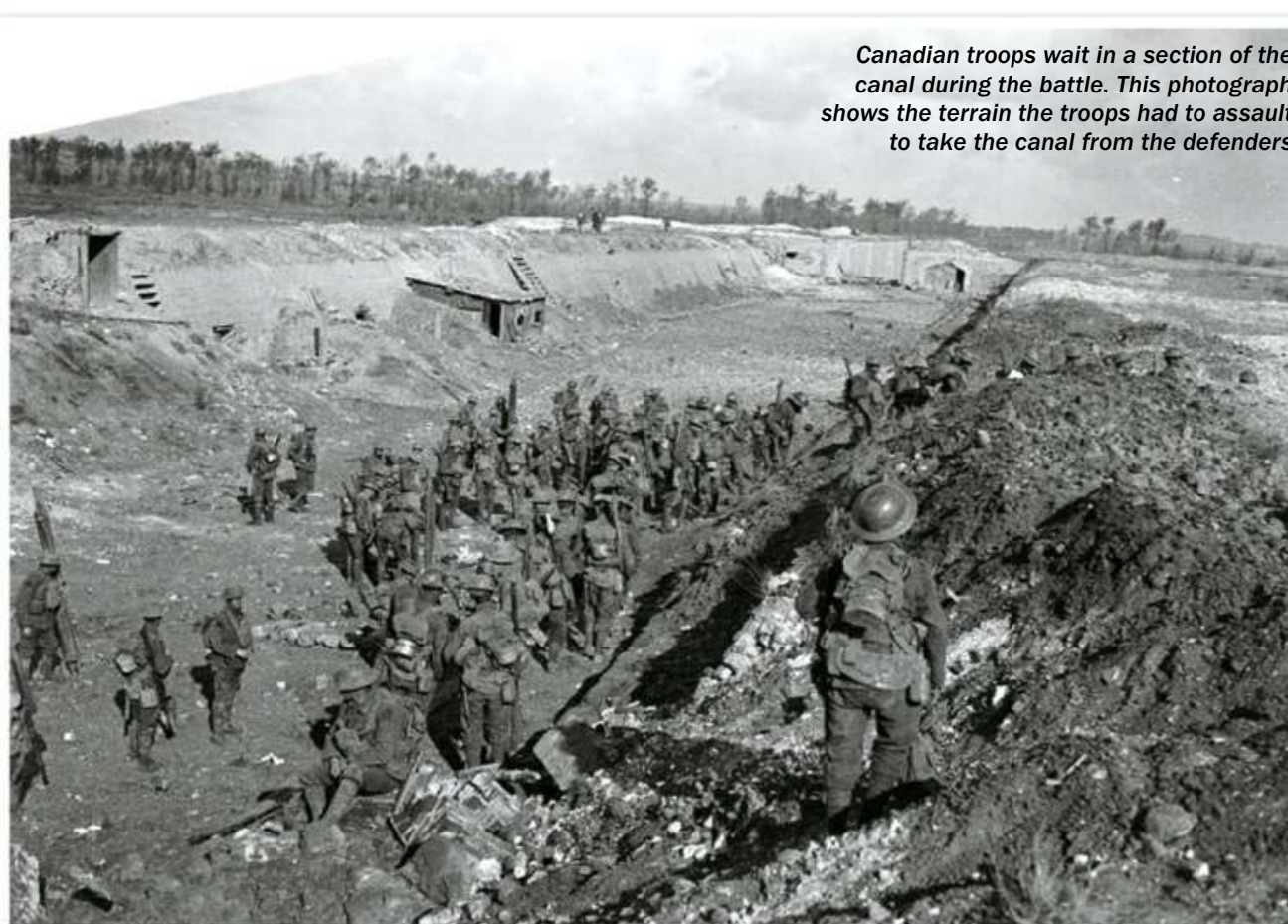
### “CAPTAIN FRISBY REALISED THAT UNLESS THE MACHINE GUN NEST WAS TAKEN, THE ENTIRE ADVANCE WOULD FAIL”

on 29 September. Speed in achieving the aims of the assault was essential, but several of the other offensives became bogged down after initial success (in the Meuse-Argonne and Flanders campaigns). Breaching the Canal du Nord would leave the path open to Cambrai. The First Army was tasked with crossing and penetrating the Canal du Nord northwest of Cambrai, while the Third Army would need to take the canal as far as the Scheldt Canal (and so be in a position to support the Fourth Army assault on Saint-Quentin on the 29th). Although it was mainly an infantry action because of the terrain, some tanks were also incorporated.

The 1st Battalion of the Coldstream Guards was part of the Third Army and was posted on the extreme left of the army's line. In keeping with the regimental motto, 'Nulli Secundus' ('Second to None'), they were placed on the extreme left of the line so that they would literally be second to none. The 1st Battalion was tasked with securing a crossing of the Canal du Nord on the Demicourt-Graincourt road, almost directly west of Cambrai. The attack was launched at 5.20am on 27 September in total darkness. Immediately to the Guards' north, the Canadian Corps (part of First Army) was tasked with capturing the important high ground in Bourlon Wood.

Cyril Hubert Frisby was acting captain of a company of the Coldstream Guards during the assault on the canal. He had enlisted as a private in the Hampshire Regiment in 1916 and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Coldstream Guards in March 1917. The Guards had suffered high casualties among its officers, so Second Lieutenant Frisby was put in command of a company as acting captain.

Born in Barnet, Hertfordshire, he was eligible to join the Guards because Barnet had been a stop on George Monck's 685-kilometre march from Coldstream to London in 1659/60, and



Canadian troops wait in a section of the canal during the battle. This photograph shows the terrain the troops had to assault to take the canal from the defenders

the counties through which Monck had marched remained the recruitment corridor for the regiment. This was unusual for the British Army, since most regiments were open to anyone from the four home nations.

Frisby witnessed the leading platoon “come under annihilating machine-gun fire” from a strong machine gun nest situated under an iron bridge on the far side of the canal. The platoon was unable to advance even when waves of reinforcements arrived. Captain Frisby realised immediately that unless the machine gun nest was taken, the entire advance would fail. If the advance failed there, then the contemporaneous assaults on the canal to the north and south would also be jeopardised. Frisby knew what needed to be done and called for volunteers to follow him across the canal.

The first man to volunteer was Lance Corporal Thomas Norman Jackson. Hailing from Swinton, near Doncaster in South Yorkshire, Jackson was 17 when war broke out in 1914. He volunteered in the 1st Battalion of the Coldstream Guards in September 1916, his

home also sitting in the traditional recruitment corridor of the regiment.

Two other men also volunteered to accompany Captain Frisby, and together the four men dashed to the canal edge and climbed down over the barbed wire into the dry canal bed, under “intense point-blank machine gun fire” from the nest. They ran forward and succeeded in capturing the machine gun post, taking two guns and 12 prisoners. In capturing the machine gun post the four men engaged in desperate hand-to-hand fighting. Frisby was wounded in the leg by a bayonet thrust but remained at his post to command further actions during the day.

For both Frisby and Jackson, this action was the mainstay of their recommendation for the Victoria Cross. Both men's citations, however, highlighted their further actions later the same morning. The actions of Frisby, Jackson and their colleagues enabled the advance of the Coldstream Guards companies to continue. Frisby then supported the neighbouring Coldstream Guards company to his right, which



had lost all of its officers and sergeants. He organised its defences, and with them held off a fierce German counterattack.

Lance Corporal Jackson went forward from the captured machine gun post to other tasks. Later that day his company was ordered to clear an enemy trench. Jackson was the first man into the position, encouraging his comrades and shouting, “Come on boys!” as he led the charge. He entered the trench and killed the first two Germans he encountered but was then shot in the head, killing him instantly. The citations for both men praised the exemplary nature of their conduct for others to emulate – Frisby being described as a “splendid example to all the ranks” and Jackson’s devotion to duty “an inspiring example to all”.

*Tanks of A Company, 7th Battalion, parking in the Canal du Nord after capturing Bourlon village just north of the Coldstream Guards’ position*



## “THE ACTIONS OF FRISBY AND JACKSON ENABLED THE ADVANCE OF THE COLDSTREAM GUARDS COMPANIES TO CONTINUE”

North of the Guards, the Canadian Corps had constructed wooden bridges to cross the canal because it was flooded in their sector. The Bourlon Woods and its high ground was captured, and by the end of 27 September, all objectives were reached.

Lance Corporal Jackson was buried with full honours in Sanders Keep Military Cemetery, Graincourt-les-Havrincourt. His fiancée and sister were presented with his Victoria Cross on 29 March 1919 by King George V at Buckingham Palace. Captain Frisby received his Victoria Cross at the same investiture ceremony. In addition to the two Victoria Crosses for Frisby and Jackson of the Coldstream Guards, another ten Victoria Crosses were awarded to participants in the Battle of the Canal du Nord – men among the Canadians and the other regiments south of the Coldstream Guards (the Grenadier Guards and other regiments) at Flesquieres. They were mostly awarded for conduct in crossing the canal at various points in the face of extreme enemy machine gun fire.

The Allied victory at the Canal du Nord was hard won and costly. Although the Germans were

on the defensive and had suffered reverses in the months leading up to the battle, they put up a fierce resistance and mounted several determined counterattacks during the battle. The success of the battle opened up the route to Cambrai and the decisive Allied Victory at the Battle of Cambrai in October 1918, notable for the relatively low number of Allied casualties.

Before the war, Thomas Jackson had been employed at the Mexborough Locomotive Depot. For reasons unknown, Lance Corporal Jackson’s name was not added to the Great Central Railway Memorial, built in 1922. This error was corrected in 2016 when his name was finally added to the memorial.

Frisby returned to the London Stock Exchange after the war, where he had been a jobber (or dealer) since 1911. His brother Lionel joined him there. Lionel had been awarded a DSO with the 6th Battalion Welsh Regiment at Maissemy and Pontru in September 1918. The two were ironically (if unkindly) known at the stock exchange as ‘the cowards’. Thereafter Cyril Frisby achieved fame as a sports fisherman, especially in regard to tuna. He died in 1961.



*A single file of infantry advances during the Battle of the Canal du Nord*



# THE WINTER WAR

Finland produced many daring generals, soldiers and pilots who successfully took on the might of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany

## CARL GUSTAF EMIL MANNERHEIM

THE MILITARY STATESMAN WHO PRESERVED FINNISH INDEPENDENCE DESPITE ENORMOUS EXTERNAL PRESSURES

**YEARS OF SERVICE: 1918-46 RANK: FIELD MARSHAL**

Born into a wealthy Finnish family of German-Swedish descent, Mannerheim is often referred to as the 'founding father' of modern Finland, but he began his career in the Imperial Russian Army in 1887, when his native country was still under Romanov rule.

He was promoted to colonel during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 and became a highly decorated general during WWI. However, after the Russian Revolution in 1917, he formed the first army of a newly independent Finland and during the 1930s constructed defence lines along the south east part of the Finnish-Russian border known as the Mannerheim Line.

At the outbreak of war in 1939, Mannerheim became commander-in-chief of the Finnish armed forces at the age of 72. During the Winter War, the troops he commanded wreaked considerable damage on the Soviets against all expectations, but Mannerheim was concerned that Finland should not be perceived as pro-German and built up a

unique political style that was neither explicitly pro-Axis or pro-Allies. Mannerheim viewed Finland as fighting virtually alone for its independence and emphasised this to his soldiers saying: "Fortifications, artillery, foreign aid will be of no value unless the ordinary soldier knows that it is he guarding his country."

Despite this patriotic call, Mannerheim was shrewd enough to understand that Finnish independence involved concessions and although the terms imposed on Finland by the USSR were harsh, the country was not occupied. Although Mannerheim disliked the Germans, his pragmatism drove him to make an unofficial alliance with the Nazis to stave off Soviet aggression.

During the Continuation War, his troops even took Soviet territory with the intention of annexing Eastern Karelia. Mannerheim became president in 1944 and managed to negotiate a settlement with the USSR that kept Finland independent, democratic and with a market economy.

*Right: Mannerheim in the uniform of a field marshal in 1942. It was largely thanks to his leadership that Finland remained independent*



## AARNE JUUTILAINEN

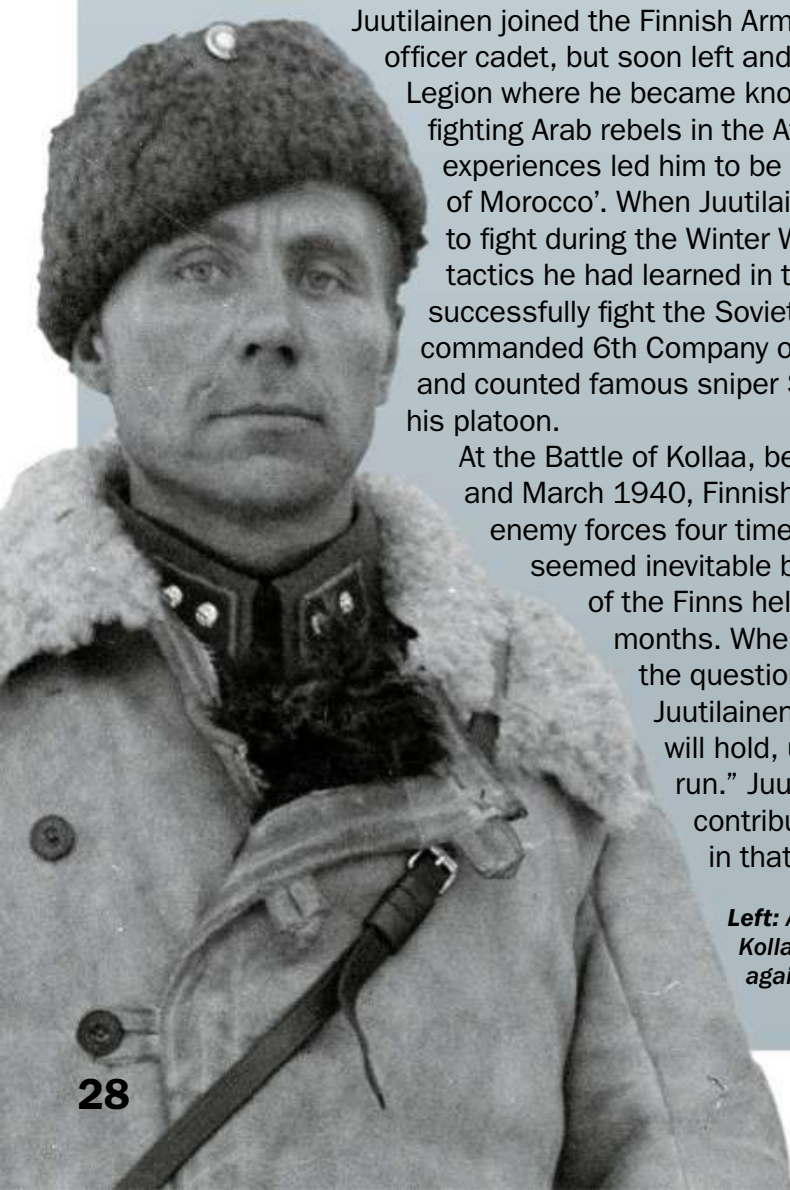
THE DEFIANT EX-LEGIONNAIRE HERO OF KOLLAA

**YEARS IN SERVICE: 1925-28, 1939-45 RANK: CAPTAIN**

Juutilainen joined the Finnish Army in the 1920s as an officer cadet, but soon left and joined the French Foreign Legion where he became known as a bold soldier, fighting Arab rebels in the Atlas Mountains. His experiences led him to be nicknamed 'The Terror of Morocco'. When Juutilainen returned to Finland to fight during the Winter War, he used the guerrilla tactics he had learned in the Foreign Legion to successfully fight the Soviets. As an officer, he commanded 6th Company of the 34th Regiment and counted famous sniper Simo Häyhä among his platoon.

At the Battle of Kollaa, between December 1939 and March 1940, Finnish troops held back enemy forces four times their size. Collapse seemed inevitable but the tenacious fighting of the Finns held the Soviets back for months. When a Finnish general posed the question, "Will Kollaa hold?" Juutilainen famously replied, "Kollaa will hold, unless we are told to run." Juutilainen's leadership contributed to the Finnish victory in that battle.

*Left: Aarne Juutilainen's bravery at Kollaa symbolised Finnish defiance against Soviet aggression*



## ILMARI JUUTILAINEN

THE OUTSTANDING FIGHTER ACE OF WWII OUTSIDE OF GERMANY

**YEARS IN SERVICE: 1932-47 RANK: WARRANT OFFICER**

The younger brother of Aarne Juutilainen, Ilmari was the highest scoring fighter ace of WWII outside of the Luftwaffe. Juutilainen joined the armed forces in 1932 for his compulsory military service and became a pilot in the Finnish Air Force with the rank of sergeant in 24 Lentolaivue (Squadron) from 1935. When the Winter War broke out, Juutilainen scored his first victory in December 1939, but he came into his own during the Continuation War in Brewster Buffalo aircraft. Although this American plane was obsolete in other theatres, it performed well in Finland and Juutilainen claimed 34 aerial combat victories during this period.

Juutilainen's total war record was outstanding. During 437 sorties, he accumulated 94 official combat victories and finished the war without a single hit to his aircraft from enemy fighters. He also never lost a wingman in combat and he intriguingly refused an officer's commission because he feared it would prevent him from flying.

**"HE FINISHED THE WAR WITHOUT A SINGLE HIT TO HIS AIRCRAFT"**



*On 30 June 1944, Juutilainen shot down six Soviet aircraft. On top of his already impressive record, this made him an 'Ace in a Day'*

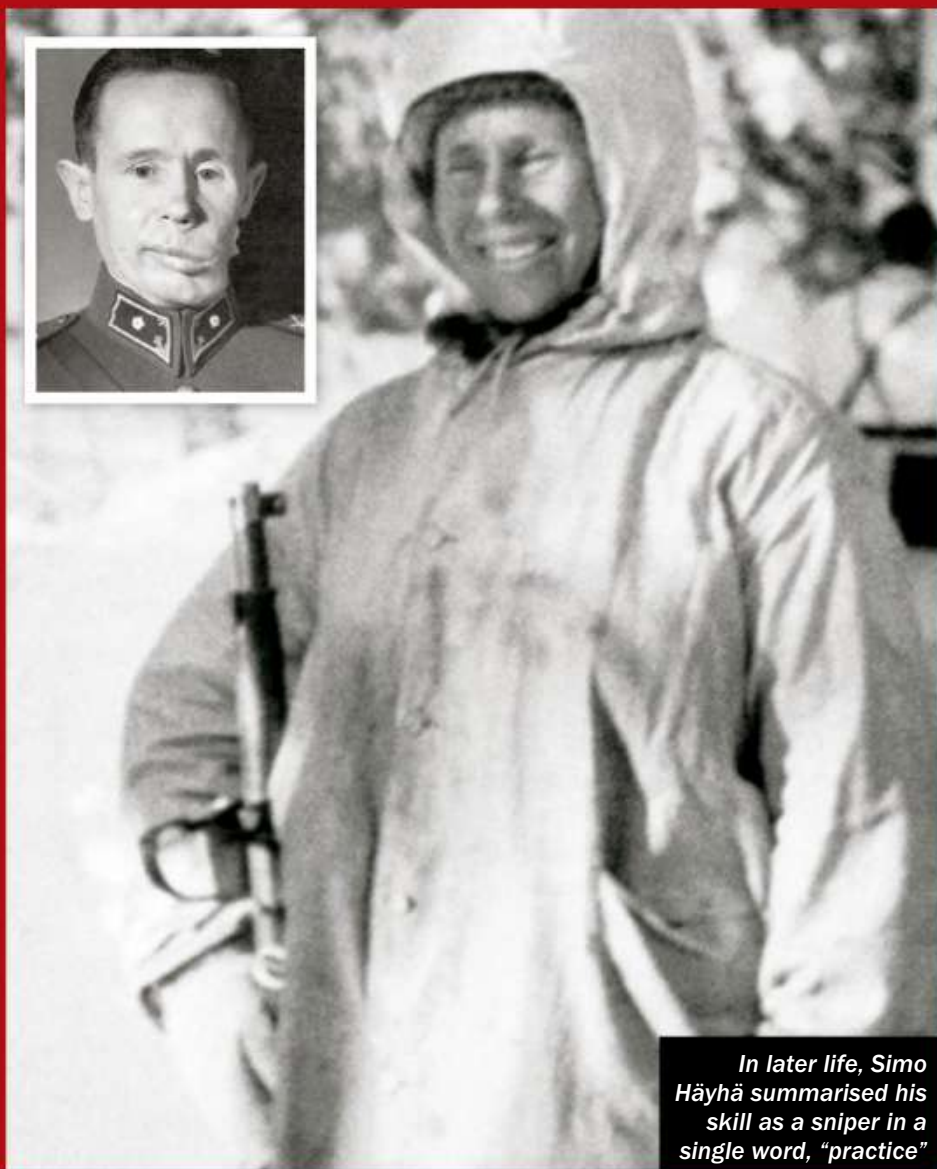


## SIMO HÄYHÄ

THE WINTER WAR'S EXCEPTIONALLY DEADLY SNIPER  
YEARS IN SERVICE: 1925-1940 RANK: CORPORAL

Nicknamed 'White Death', Häyhä is widely regarded to have been the most skilled and successful sniper in any major war, with more than 500 kills to his name. As a member of the Finnish Civil Guard, Häyhä rigorously trained in target practice and in his spare time. He could eventually hit a target 16 times per minute at 152 metres.

From 1939, he served on the Kollaa River, where the Finns would hide off the roads in the wilderness and attack Soviet forces from behind. Häyhä would dress in white winter camouflage, carry a few days' supplies with him and kill any Russians who crossed his path. Remarkably, Häyhä used his rifle's iron sights instead of a scope and in a 100-day period managed to kill 500 Russians at an average rate of five kills a day. He only stopped when he was seriously wounded in the jaw by an explosive round from a counter-sniper (see inset below).



*In later life, Simo Häyhä summarised his skill as a sniper in a single word, "practice"*



*Hjalmar Siilasvuo (right) had a short temper and could be standoffish, but he was among Finland's most successful generals*

## HJALMAR SIILASVUO

THE SCOURGE OF SOVIET RUSSIA AND NAZI GERMANY  
YEARS IN SERVICE: 1918-47 RANK: LIEUTENANT GENERAL

Born in Helsinki, Siilasvuo fought as an officer in WWI with Finnish volunteers in the Imperial German Army. As a colonel during the Winter War in 1940, troops under Siilasvuo's command captured hundreds of cannon and trucks, dozens of tanks and thousands of horses, light weapons and ammunition from the Red Army. Notwithstanding the additional death of thousands of soldiers, the loss to the Soviets was so great that the Soviet High Command executed a number of generals in its aftermath.

Siilasvuo was later given command of Finnish forces fighting in the Lapland War against the Germans between 1944-45. His task was to drive German forces out of the country in the far north into occupied Norway. At the first major engagement between the Finnish and German forces, the Finns won a hard-fought landing at Tornio on the Swedish border. From that point on, the Germans felt the Finns had betrayed them and Siilasvuo continued to lead the successful campaign to eject them from Finland.

**"SIILASVUO'S COMMAND CAPTURED HUNDREDS OF CANNON AND TRUCKS, DOZENS OF TANKS AND THOUSANDS OF HORSES, LIGHT WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION FROM THE RED ARMY"**

## LAURI TÖRNI

THE MORTAL ENEMY OF THE SOVIET UNION SERVED IN THREE ARMIES TO FIGHT THEM  
YEARS IN SERVICE: 1938-44 RANK: CAPTAIN

Törni was a daring officer whose lifelong fight against the Soviet Union saw him fight for three countries: Finland, Germany and the United States. He joined the Finnish Army in 1938, but received training as an SS volunteer before returning to Finland as an officer. During the Continuation War, Törni became famous as a commander of an infantry unit that was nicknamed 'Detachment Törni'. Otherwise known as the 'Lightning Bolts', this unit would penetrate deep behind enemy lines and inflict such damage on the Red Army that

the Soviets placed a bounty of 3,000,000 Finnish marks on Törni's head.

For his bravery, Törni was awarded Finland's highest decoration, the Mannerheim Cross, but after peace was made with the Soviets in 1944, Törni rejoined the SS and led a detachment of German marines until the war's end. He was awarded the Iron Cross and later immigrated to the United States where he joined the US Army. He died fighting in the Vietnam War, but not before receiving a Bronze Star and five Purple Hearts.



*Lauri Törni as a Finnish lieutenant during the Continuation War. He was the only Finn that the Soviets placed a bounty on between 1939-44*



# CHURCHILL'S

## SECRET ARMY

In history's darkest hour, the Special Operations Executive not only inspired resistance movements all over the world, but also played a pivotal role in stopping the Axis war machine...

WORDS NICK SOLDINGER





*Above: Agents assigned to Operation Jedburgh receive instruction from an SOE briefing officer*

**O**ccupied France, September 1943. As an express train clatters through the countryside, a British spy codenamed White Rabbit enters the dining car. It's mid-afternoon and the car's spilling over with French civilians, German soldiers, and SS men. It's a risk but the spy, who's headed to Paris to meet resistance chiefs, hasn't eaten since breakfast. Even when the waiter tells him there are no seats, his hunger overwhelms his fear. He presses a banknote into the waiter's hand and asks him, in faultless French, to look again.

Moments later the spy is being led down the carriage to its only spare seat. Approaching it through a swirl of cigarette smoke, he falters. The table he's being led to is crammed with high-ranking Nazi officers. Turning back, he realises, will arouse suspicions. He'll have to bluff it out. So he sits, heart pounding, and shakes his napkin out. When he looks up at his fellow diners, though, he realises just how far he's crawled into the monster's mouth.

Sitting opposite him is Nikolaus 'Klaus' Barbie, the so-called Butcher of Lyon. The White Rabbit is about to dine with not only the most ruthless Gestapo chief in the whole of France, but the man who's been hunting him for almost six months...

This sounds like the start of a James Bond novel, and with good reason. White Rabbit's

real name was Forest Yeo-Thomas, and his escapades – like this encounter with the ruthless Barbie – were so extraordinary that some now believe he was the inspiration for Ian Fleming's 007. But there was nothing fictitious about his exploits, or the 13,000 other agents who also served in the Special Operations Executive (SOE) during the Second World War.

Although details of their clandestine crusade would remain hidden from the public for decades, it's no exaggeration to say that without this secret army of saboteurs and assassins, the Allies might well have lost the war. By VE Day, the SOE had not only hampered Japanese operations throughout Asia, but paved the way for the D-Day landings, and most significantly smashed Hitler's hopes of developing the world's first nuclear weapon. Theirs was an extraordinary story. One that began in the entirely ordinary surroundings of a London office block five years earlier.

By July 1940, with its expeditionary force booted out of Europe, and the swastika fluttering over its allies' capitals, Britain stood alone. The mood in the country was apprehensive but defiant. Nobody embodied this better than Britain's new prime minister, Winston Churchill, and he was eager to take the fight back to the enemy.

**“THE WHITE RABBIT IS ABOUT TO DINE WITH NOT ONLY THE MOST RUTHLESS GESTAPO CHIEF IN THE WHOLE OF FRANCE, BUT THE MAN WHO'S BEEN HUNTING HIM FOR ALMOST SIX MONTHS...”**





Operatives training for Operation Jedburgh at Milton Hall, England

“CHURCHILL KNEW ALL ABOUT THE POWER OF GUERRILLA WARFARE – HE’D BEEN ON THE WRONG END OF IT TWICE... HE NOW ORDERED THE SOE TO ‘SET EUROPE ABLAZE!’”

One of his first acts as PM was to create the SOE – a covert organisation that would encourage widespread revolt in the occupied countries via a co-ordinated campaign of resistance. Churchill knew all about the power of guerrilla warfare – he’d been on the wrong end of it twice. First as a combatant in the Boer War, and then again as a government minister during the Irish War of Independence. He’d also been friends with perhaps the greatest guerrilla commander ever – Lawrence of Arabia, whose brilliant war against the Turks in the Middle East had brought down the Ottoman Empire. With these influences in mind, he now ordered the SOE to “set Europe ablaze!”

**The Baker Street Irregulars**

Within weeks, SOE’s HQ was established at 64 Baker Street in London. Behind its anonymous grey walls its founders set about recruiting, training and equipping agents who came to be known as the Baker Street Irregulars. From its inception, the SOE was split into two distinct divisions: one that dealt with recruitment, training and operations, and the other with support.

Recruitment to SOE was as unorthodox as the organisation itself. Because of its top-secret nature, it couldn’t advertise for spies. Instead, candidates were sourced through methods ranging from word-of-mouth recommendation to recruiters studying lists of people who’d sent in correct solutions to the *Daily Telegraph*’s notoriously tricky crossword.

Potential recruits were then invited for an interview at a hotel near Trafalgar Square. Here, in a sparsely furnished room, they’d face a cryptic line of questioning during which the interviewer would suddenly switch to speaking either German or French. Anyone who became flustered or couldn’t respond was immediately asked to leave.

**Specialist training**

Obviously, being fluent in the language of the country an agent was expected to operate in was crucial, as was having a good understanding of its culture. Potential agents were quizzed about their background and what motivated them. Then it’d be down to the recruiter’s judgement whether the wannabe spy had ‘it’, ‘it’ being a unique kind of courage and

**FOUNDERS OF THE SOE**

IT MAY HAVE BEEN ESSENTIALLY A MILITARY ORGANISATION, BUT THE SOE WAS CREATED AND MANAGED BY POLITICIANS

**WINSTON CHURCHILL, BRITISH PRIME MINISTER**  
YEARS ACTIVE: 1940-45



Churchill’s years as a soldier, politician and journalist meant he was well prepared to lead Britain through a war it was ill-equipped to win. The SOE was typical of the imaginative, often eccentric, schemes he green-lit. In its darkest hour, Britain became a place where all voices came to be valued. Oddballs, boffins and outsiders all thrived under his leadership.

**GLADWYN JEBB, HEAD OF THE SOE**  
YEARS ACTIVE: 1940-45



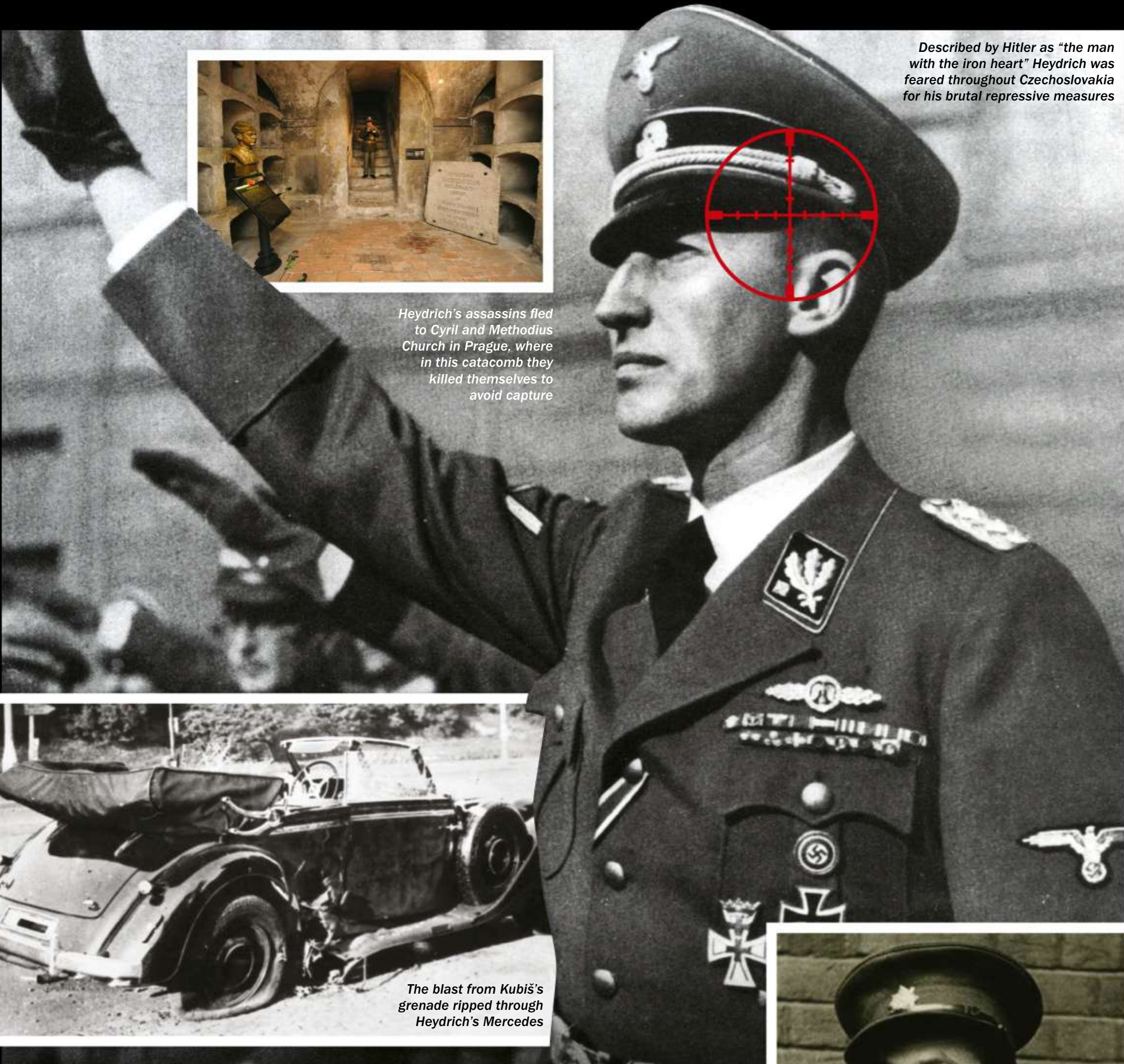
A career diplomat, Jebb was appointed SOE chief because of his background working with both the Foreign Office and MI6. Jebb also had first-hand experience of life under Fascist rule, having been Britain’s ambassador to Rome during the earliest days of the Mussolini regime. After the war, he helped draft the UN’s first charter and became its first Secretary General.

**HUGH DALTON, MINISTER OF ECONOMIC WARFARE**  
YEARS ACTIVE: 1940-42



Dalton was given political responsibility for the SOE when it was formed. A decorated veteran of 1917’s Battle of Caporetto, when the Italian front had collapsed under a ferocious Austro-German assault, he had direct experience of fighting against overwhelming odds. He was also a brilliant economist who saw both the financial and tactical sense of creating a low-maintenance guerrilla army.





Described by Hitler as “the man with the iron heart” Heydrich was feared throughout Czechoslovakia for his brutal repressive measures

Heydrich’s assassins fled to Cyril and Methodius Church in Prague, where in this catacomb they killed themselves to avoid capture

The blast from Kubiš’s grenade ripped through Heydrich’s Mercedes

Right: Jan Kubiš was trained in Britain for the operation in Prague

# OPERATION ANTHROPOID

27 MAY 1942 ★ PRAGUE, PROTECTORATE OF BOHEMIA

A HIGHLY RISKY PLAN IS DEvised TO ASSASSINATE THE HATED NAZI GOVERNOR OF BOHEMIA, REINHARD HEYDRICH...

Having been abandoned by her allies at the Munich Conference, which had legitimised Hitler’s occupation of the country in 1938, Czechoslovakia had been all but subjugated by the brutal Nazi regime by the time the war started. Initially resistance was scant – something the exiled Czech government was keen to change. The SOE devised something to inspire Czechs to stand up for themselves. What they came up with was both dramatic and dangerous – the assassination of the region’s ruler, Reinhard Heydrich.

In May 1942 two exiled Czech agents, Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš, parachuted back into their

homeland. In Prague, 27 May, as Heydrich was being driven to work in his open-topped Mercedes, the pair ambushed him. As his car rounded a corner, Gabčík stepped into the street with a Sten gun and squeezed the trigger, but the weapon jammed. The car screeched to a halt and Heydrich stood up, scrambling for his side arm. Before he could shoot, though, Kubiš threw a grenade at the car. Shrapnel from the blast ripped through the car’s body, mortally wounding the Nazi chief.

The two agents escaped – but only temporarily. They were later discovered in a nearby church and, after a six-hour gun battle, took their own lives

rather than be captured. Nazi retribution for the assassination was horrific. Two nearby villages, Lidice and Ležáky, were falsely linked to the assassins so were flattened and their 500-plus inhabitants murdered. The assassination and subsequent atrocity, however, had the desired effect. The outraged Czechoslovakian population began fighting back against the Nazis in earnest.





resourcefulness that suggested they'd be able to operate alone, deep in hostile territory, and in constant fear for their life.

After selection, recruits were trained at a series of secret locations throughout Britain. These included requisitioned country houses, factories, hotels, and even the Natural History Museum where – among other things – agents learned how to pack camel dung, supplied by London Zoo, with plastic explosives.

The training schools represented three stages of preparation for life behind enemy lines. The so-called 'A Schools' were essentially paramilitary academies. Here, over a span of five weeks, agents studied martial arts, weapons handling, demolitions, map reading, Morse code and field craft, all against a backdrop of intense physical exercise.

Once they'd passed this stage, agents had to undergo specialist training at one of the SOE's 'B Schools'. Initially, all agents undertook parachute training at what is now Manchester Airport. Parachuting was still in its infancy during the 1940s, and the type taught to SOE operatives was extremely hazardous. Because the planes they dropped from had to come in low to avoid detection by radar, agents were trained to jump 'blind' – namely at night with little idea of the area they were launching themselves into. Jumps were typically from around 300 feet and lasted just 15 seconds. Agents then had to land in such a way that the shovel strapped to their thigh – which was brought to bury the 'chute – didn't break their leg. Fatalities weren't unknown at this stage.

If recruits got through jump school unscathed, they then moved onto lessons with subjects such as personal security, maintaining a cover story and how to act while under police surveillance. Agents were even taught how to break into properties, crack safes and pick locks. These were all skills that, in many cases, were passed on to them by ex-cons who'd been given reprieves in exchange for helping the war effort with their knowledge.

The final stage of training was at the SOE Finishing School at Beaulieu in Hampshire, where agents were taught acting and surveillance skills. Here each would be given their cover story, before being schooled in the use of costume and disguises. The agents were then assessed in 'schemes' lasting 48 to 72 hours – effectively dress rehearsals designed to test their resilience and that of their cover story. The ability to bluff convincingly was seen as key to their survival.

*Below: Radio operators were essential to connecting the network of agents spread throughout occupied Europe*



# SPECIAL OPERATIONS AROUND THE GLOBE

THE SOE CO-ORDINATED A WIDESPREAD CAMPAIGN OF RESISTANCE. THE POWER OF GUERILLA WARFARE WOULD BE FELT BY THEIR ENEMIES WORLDWIDE

**OPERATION CARTHAGE**  
**1945 DENMARK**  
SOE intelligence helps a successful RAF raid on the Gestapo HQ in the heart of Copenhagen. Records are destroyed and several key Danish resistance members escape.

**OPERATION TEMPEST**  
**1944 POLAND**  
SOE agents are dropped to help the Polish uprising in Warsaw. After a bitter six-week battle, it's crushed, partly because Stalin refuses to let the Poles be resupplied from Soviet territory.

**OPERATION TYPICAL**  
**1943 YUGOSLAVIA**  
Having initially backed the royalist Chetniks, Churchill switches support to Tito's Communists because they are "killing more Germans". This mission sees SOE agents dropped in to co-ordinate operations with the Communist forces.

**OPERATION FALAISE**  
**1942 MOROCCO**  
To monitor Allied shipping in the Mediterranean, the Germans set up an observation station in Tangier equipped with advanced night observation equipment. SOE agents blow this station up after four months.

**OPERATION POSTMASTER**  
**1942 GULF OF GUINEA**  
When three Axis ships suspected of transporting arms dock at the Spanish-owned island of Fernando Po, off the Nigerian coast, an SOE-organised raiding party boards and hijacks them.



# OPERATION JAYWICK

1943 ★ SINGAPORE

EUROPE MAY HAVE BEEN THE PRIMARY THEATRE OF ITS OPERATIONS, BUT SOE'S GUERRILLA TACTICS WERE EQUALLY EFFECTIVE IN THE FAR EAST

One of SOE's more-astounding operations was carried out by a team of 14 agents led by Captain Ivan Lyon. The British army officer had escaped to Australia after Singapore had fallen to the Japanese, and he was determined to hit back.

In August 1943, Lyon and his Anglo-Australian force set sail from Australia in a captured Japanese fishing boat and headed back to Singapore. The epic three-week voyage took the team through 2,000 miles of Japanese-controlled seas, until they reached a small island off the coast of Singapore. From here, on the evening of 26 September, the team crept across the channel to Singapore Harbour in three kayaks, attached a string of limpet mines to Japanese vessels in the port, before slipping away again undetected. Around 50,000 tonnes of Japanese shipping was destroyed that night. Lyon was killed while attempting a similar raid a year later.

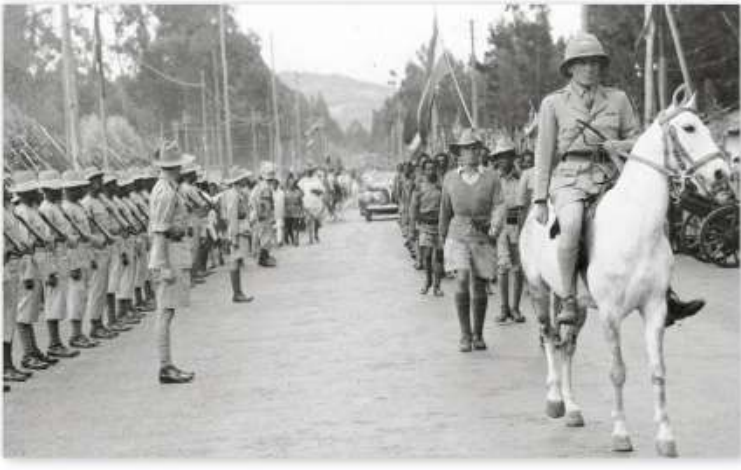


Singapore Harbour is seen here from afar, pictured in 1941

## MISSION 101

1941 ABYSSINIA

Accompanied by Emperor Haile Selassie, Colonel Orde Wingate (later leader of the Chindit special forces in Burma) leads Assyrian and Sudanese troops against the Italians and liberates Addis Ababar.



## OPERATION REMORSE

1940-45 HONG KONG

Essentially a smuggling operation set up to help raise funds for SOE activities, Operation Remorse deals in diamonds, foreign currency, rubber and machinery – it raises £77 million.

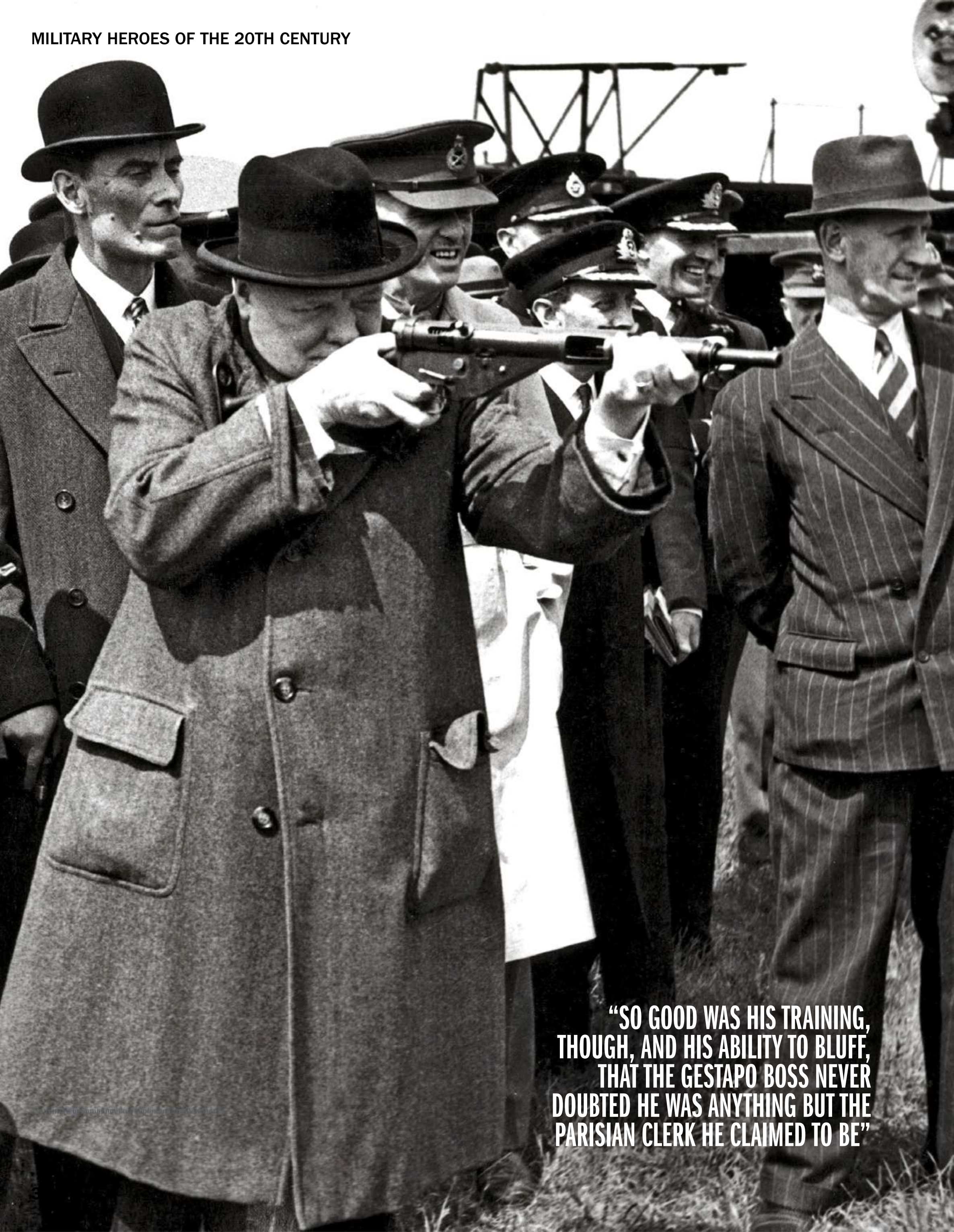
“THE TEAM CREPT ACROSS THE CHANNEL TO SINGAPORE HARBOUR IN THREE KAYAKS, ATTACHED A STRING OF LIMPET MINES TO JAPANESE VESSELS IN THE PORT, BEFORE SLIPPING AWAY AGAIN UNDETECTED. AROUND 50,000 TONNES OF JAPANESE SHIPPING WAS DESTROYED THAT NIGHT”

## FORCE 136

1942-45 MALAY

Force 136 is the cover name given to SOE operations in Malay. Under the guidance of Colonel Spencer Chapman, hugely effective Chinese guerrilla groups are organised to fight the Japanese.





**“SO GOOD WAS HIS TRAINING,  
THOUGH, AND HIS ABILITY TO BLUFF,  
THAT THE GESTAPO BOSS NEVER  
DOUBTED HE WAS ANYTHING BUT THE  
PARISIAN CLERK HE CLAIMED TO BE”**



# OPERATION ENGLANDSPIEL

1942-43 ★ THE NETHERLANDS

NOT ALL SOE OPERATIONS WERE A SUCCESS – IN HOLLAND THE NAZIS INFILTRATED A BRITISH SPY CIRCUIT, RESULTING IN THE EXECUTION OF MANY AGENTS

In March 1942, an SOE radio operator called Herbert Lauwers was arrested in The Hague. Under the direction of German intelligence officer Major Hermann Giskes, Lauwers was then forced to transmit messages to London feeding back false information. To alert Baker Street that he'd been captured, Lauwers deliberately left out his own security code when transmitting, but inexplicably the SOE's Dutch section continuously ignored its omission. Worse, they continued to send out agents and announce to Giskes, via Lauwers, where they'd be landing. Giskes called his counter-intelligence operation the *Englandspiel* or England game, and he played it impeccably for the next 20 months.

It wasn't until November 1943 when two SOE agents escaped a Gestapo jail in the Netherlands and made it to Switzerland, that London found out what was happening. The game came to an end, but by then some 61 agents had been arrested and shot.

**Right:** When transmitting, SOE radio operators would include a security code to confirm their identity and authenticate the message



Once trained, the agent was then handed over to SOE's support department to be kitted out. In the *James Bond* books, 007 is supplied with a stream of eccentric gadgets by the Whitehall boffin Q. In reality, SOE's quartermasters supplied their agents with a variety of weapons that were, if anything, even more fiendish. These included exploding rats, guns disguised as cigars, and daggers concealed in pencils. Even itching powder was used, with agents managing to contaminate U-Boat crew underwear and German army-issue condoms with the stuff. It is little wonder Churchill dubbed the SOE 'The School of Ungentlemanly Warfare.'

## Behind enemy lines

As well as weapons, the support units also supplied everything the agent needed to make their cover convincing. That included forged identity cards, passes, ration cards and just about any other documentation needed to survive in Nazi-occupied Europe. Attention to detail was absolutely paramount. One missed number or misspelled word could cost an agent his or her life.

The same applied to an agent's costume. At the start of the war, operatives were given authentic clothes taken from refugees fleeing the Nazi tidal wave. As time went on, though, the SOE had to develop its own fashion department to go alongside its forgery office. Tailors were drafted in who specialised in creating clothing made to continental patterns. Again, every fine point was considered right

# SOE'S GALLERY OF ROGUES

MISFITS, MISCREANTS, DOUBLE AGENTS AND FUTURE HOLLYWOOD STARS WERE ALL DRAWN TO THE RANKS OF THE SO-CALLED BAKER STREET IRREGULARS

## FOREST YEO-THOMAS

**YEARS ACTIVE:** 1940-45  
British-born Yeo-Thomas spent much of his childhood in France and was immersed in both the culture and the language. His early life had been a heady mix of adventure and glamour. At 17 he'd escaped a Soviet prison by strangling a guard, but by his 30s he was working for a Parisian fashion house. Already a middle-aged man by the time the war started, he would become arguably SOE's most daring agent and, according to some, the inspiration for *James Bond*.



## VIOLETTE SZABO

**YEARS ACTIVE:** 1943-45  
Born in France of Anglo-French parents, but raised in Brixton, south London, Violette Szabo was a single mother when she joined SOE. Her husband, an officer in the Free French Army, had been killed fighting in Egypt in 1942 shortly after she'd given birth to their daughter. Her first SOE mission to France was a success but her second, after the D-Day landings, resulted in her arrest. She was executed at Ravensbrück concentration camp the following year aged just 23.



## KIM PHILBY

**YEARS ACTIVE:** 1940-41  
Kim Philby's notorious career in espionage began as an SOE "instructor in clandestine propaganda". With access to the communiqués from the Enigma code-busters at Bletchley Park, Philby was able to forewarn Stalin about both the German invasion of the USSR in 1941, and the Japanese decision to attack Singapore rather than Russia the following year as Hitler had demanded. The former information was ignored, the latter ensured Moscow never fell to the Nazis. Philby was later exposed as a Soviet spy.



## ANTHONY QUAYLE

**YEARS ACTIVE:** 1943-44  
Given the nature of the work, it's perhaps not surprising that a number of SOE agents ended up as actors – some like Anthony Quayle even ended up as Hollywood stars. Quayle was dropped into Albania in 1943. By then Italy, which had occupied the country for four years, had capitulated, and German troops were filling the void. Quayle was instructed to co-ordinate local partisan efforts in tying down thousands of its troops in this remote and wild part of Europe.



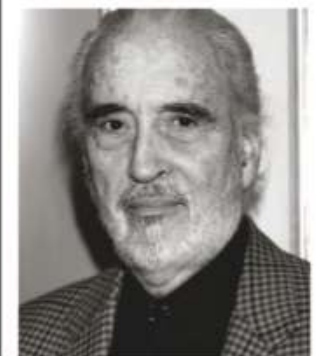
## ODETTE HALLOWES

**YEARS ACTIVE:** 1942-45  
French-born Odette Hallows was a mother of three when she agreed to be sent back to her homeland to act as an SOE courier for a resistance circuit. Arrested within a year of landing and sentenced to death, she suffered despicable torture before being sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp for execution. She survived the war and remains the only woman in history to have received the George Cross – Britain's highest non-military honour for bravery – while still alive.



## CHRISTOPHER LEE

**YEARS ACTIVE:** 1942-45  
Best known these days for his villainous roles in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Dracula* films, this Hollywood star was also an SOE agent. He served in North Africa and Italy but to this day remains secretive about the nature of his work. Although he recently admitted to being "attached to the SAS from time to time", Lee has consistently refused to elaborate further about his role in the SOE. Intriguingly he is also *James Bond* author Ian Fleming's cousin.

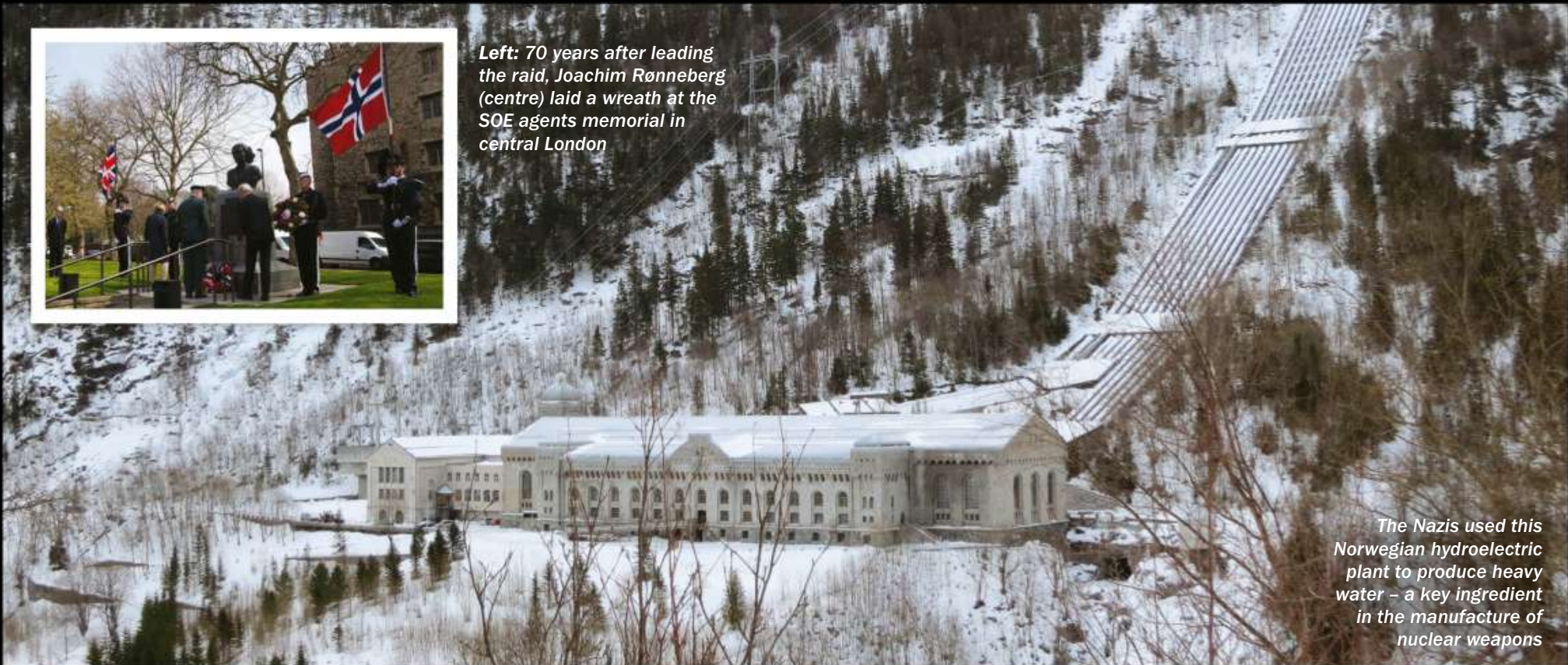




# OPERATION GUNNERSIDE

1943 🇳🇴 NORWAY

HOW A DRAMATIC SOE RAID ON A REMOTE NORWEGIAN FACTORY CHANGED THE ENTIRE COURSE OF THE WAR



*Left: 70 years after leading the raid, Joachim Rønneberg (centre) laid a wreath at the SOE agents memorial in central London*

*The Nazis used this Norwegian hydroelectric plant to produce heavy water – a key ingredient in the manufacture of nuclear weapons*

In 1942 the Allies discovered that the Nazis were developing a nuclear bomb. Essential to that process was a chemical known as ‘heavy water’, which they were producing at Vemork Hydroelectric Plant in Norway. Clearly any success in this endeavour could spell doom for the Allies, so was decided that the Nazis’ stockpile must be destroyed – SOE was given the job.

A four-man team was parachuted into Norway in October 1942. In February 1943, they were joined by a further six agents and a raid on the plant was

planned. Not that reaching the factory was easy. Perched on a rocky outcrop, it was apparently only accessible via a bridge that had a 24-hour guard, and was overlooked by machine guns and searchlights. The all-Norwegian team, led by Captain Joachim Rønneberg, however, discovered they could reach Vemork by climbing down the gorge and avoiding the bridge altogether.

The attack began just after midnight on 28 February 1943. The squad, having cut its way through the plant’s steel fence, split in two.

One half stayed at the perimeter to provide covering fire in the event the raid was rumbled, while the other broke into the factory. Led by Rønneberg, it made its way to the heavy water store. Here charges were laid with just 30-second fuses. The team hadn’t been detected but were determined to make sure the bombs went off, even if it resulted in their capture. In the event, the Norwegians escaped unscathed, and Nazi Germany was prevented from becoming the world’s first nuclear power.

# OPERATION HARLING

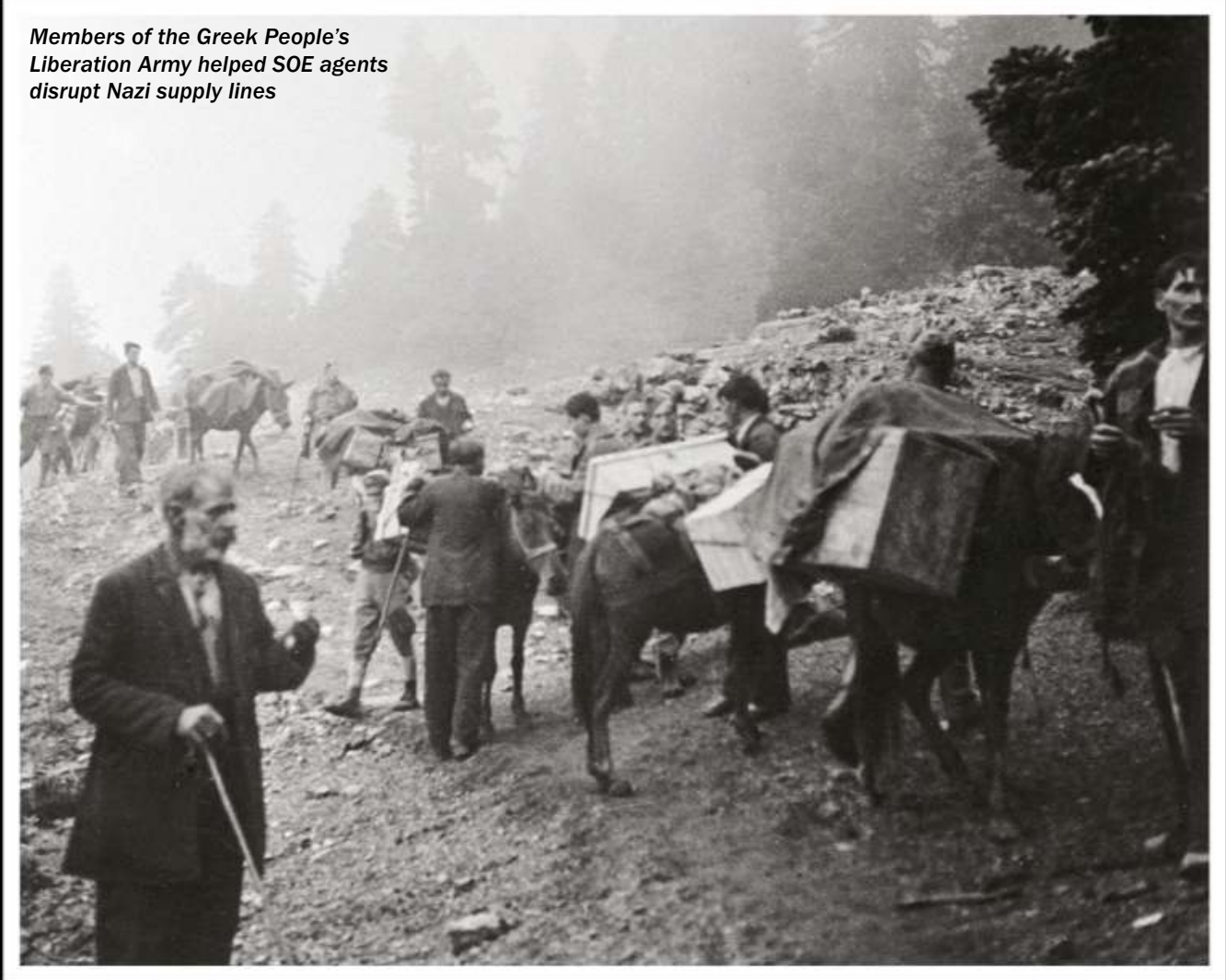
1942 🇬🇷 GREECE

GERMANY’S MONUMENTAL MILITARY UNDERTAKINGS MEANT ITS SUPPLY LINES WERE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE – A FACT THAT WAS NOT LOST ON SOE COMMANDERS

In 1942, the SOE was tasked with severing a railway in Greece, which was a main supply route for Rommel’s Afrika Korps. Led by Brigadier Eddie Myers a 12-man team was dropped into Greece on 1 October with orders to blow a bridge along the railway’s route.

Myers identified the Gorgopotamos Bridge, with its garrison of 80 Italian soldiers, as the softest target. Joined by a force of over 100 local fighters his team hit the bridge at 11pm on 25 November. Communication wires were cut, and the garrison’s outposts at either end of the bridge attacked. Resistance was stiffer than expected, though, and Myers had to send his saboteurs in under fire. It took them three hours to wire the bridge up, during which Italian reinforcements joined the fighting. At 02.21am the last of three explosions finally destroyed the bridge. Myers’ troops slipped away having suffered just four casualties.

*Members of the Greek People’s Liberation Army helped SOE agents disrupt Nazi supply lines*





down to the buttons and zips. A Made in England label could easily betray the wearer. Once ready, agents were then dropped behind enemy lines where they would typically fulfil one of three roles: wireless operator, courier (a role often ascribed to female agents who it was thought aroused less suspicion), and circuit organiser (CO).

The CO's job was to create and manage a circuit of cells, each one made up of approximately 20 to 25 resistance fighters. To maintain maximum security, these cells would operate independently of and know as little about one another as possible. The CO was the only person on the ground who knew everyone, effectively sitting on top of a pyramid that could contain dozens of cells and hundreds of members. That way, if one cell was infiltrated the whole circuit wouldn't collapse.

For the Gestapo, COs became highly prized trophies, and SOE operatives were trained to expect the worst if captured. 'Play for time' was the mantra that was drummed into agents at Beaulieu. If arrested, a brutal interrogation was inevitable, and agents were instructed to hold out for at least 24 hours in order to buy their circuit valuable time to get away and regroup.

By the time Yeo-Thomas sat down with Klaus Barbie in that dining car in September 1943, he was arguably the best-connected CO in occupied Europe. So good was his training, though, and his ability to bluff, that the Gestapo boss never doubted he was anything but the Parisian clerk he claimed to be. In fact, such was Forest Yeo-Thomas' chutzpah that he even grumbled to Klaus Barbie about how recent acts of sabotage – acts that he himself helped to organise – had disrupted the train service. The Nazi apparently promised he was doing everything possible to catch those responsible.

At the end of the meal, the White Rabbit walked away. It would be decades before Barbie, by then living under an alias himself as a war criminal in Bolivia, would learn just how close he'd come to capturing his arch-nemesis.



# SOE AND D-DAY

WHEN THE ALLIED INVASION OF EUROPE CAME, THE ROLE PLAYED BY SOE'S GUERRILLA FORCES WAS TO PROVE COSTLY BUT VITAL

France was arguably the most important country SOE operated in. Not only did the circuits there provide intel that proved vital during D-Day, but once the invasion started the secret army SOE had nurtured there emerged from the shadows to bring down Fortress Europe from within.

During the evening of 5 June, 1944, as the Allied invasion force neared the Normandy coast, the French resistance was called to arms by the BBC. The corporation's radio broadcasts had long been used to transmit coded messages to occupied Europe and it now sent word that the liberation was coming. A carefully planned campaign to disrupt the routes leading into Normandy now began.

This tactic was designed to paralyse the German response and although it was to prove

highly effective, it often came at a high price. The harassment of the SS Panzer Division Das Reich stands out as one such example. Stationed in south-west France, the division first tried to rush to Normandy by train, only to discover all the local rolling stock had been sabotaged, so instead drove the panzers north.

Harried every step of the way, its commanders became increasingly infuriated and at the village of Oradour-Sur-Glane in central France, on the 10 June, a further delay resulted in the massacre of 642 civilians. Not that the hold-ups stopped. Instead of the usual four days, Das Reich's road trip took 15. By the time it arrived in Normandy, the bridgeheads were established and the tide of the war had already turned.

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

**DELAY-ACTION FUSE**  
Different coloured ampules of acid dissolve at different times (sometimes as much as a month), completing the circuit and detonating the explosives.

**MCLAGLEN PESKETT CLOSE COMBAT WEAPON**  
A weighted bludgeon, stabbing blade and wire garrote all in one.

**MINIATURE MONOCULAR**  
Extending to 3 inches and boasting x2 magnification.

**FAIRBAIRN-SYKES FIGHTING KNIFE**

**FP-45 LIBERATOR**  
The US-made single-shot Liberator pistol was designed to be dropped behind enemy lines in huge numbers for resistance forces. It was never widely used.

**COMPASS**

**SOE AT BEAULIEU**  
Though best known for its National Motor Museum, Beaulieu also hosts a permanent Secret Army Exhibition dedicated to the Special Operation Executive's 'Finishing School' which was held on the estate during World War II. Find out more at [www.beaulieu.co.uk](http://www.beaulieu.co.uk).

**KNUCKLEDUSTER**

**THUMB KNIFE**



# LIGHT TANK HEROES

The tactical prowess behind the formidable machines

## THE DESERT RATS

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 1938-1958 **COUNTRY:** GREAT BRITAIN

The British 7th Armoured Division, colloquially known as the Desert Rats, was initially formed in Egypt to increase British strength in Africa and the Middle East following the Munich Agreement in 1938. Set up as a mobile force, it was quickly developed into a division made up of a cavalry brigade supported by artillery cannons and howitzers, and was soon joined by the Royal Rifle Corps, which became a motorised battalion.

Following the outbreak of World War II, the Desert Rats regularly found themselves in combat with the Italian Army, which largely outnumbered the British contingent. However, due to the Italians' lack of armour and its reliance on outdated ordnance – including artillery that dated back to World War I – the Desert Rats were soon the dominant force.

However, it wasn't long before a more threatening enemy was close by. General Erwin Rommel, one of the finest tacticians of the war, soon landed in Africa under orders from Hitler and brought

with him his Afrika Korps. This led to a series of vicious and pivotal conflicts including battles at Tobruk and El Alamein, eventually resulting in the Axis retreat to Italy. The Desert Rats fought in Italy, before being recalled to Britain to aid in the Normandy landings of June 1944, now armed with heavier Cromwell tanks.

The courage and tactical mastery of the British 7th Armoured Division proved to be indispensable at a time when the German and Italian armies were in a strong position to increase their influence in Africa and the Middle East, and their gifted command of light tanks gave them the edge on tough, unforgiving terrain. The division's legacy lives on in name and tradition through the 7th Armoured Brigade, which still proudly sports the old rat insignia today.

It's a small nod to the past that was very much earned by the boys of the 7th – after all, these are the brave men that chased the Germans all the way from Egypt to Berlin.

## HEINZ GUDERIAN

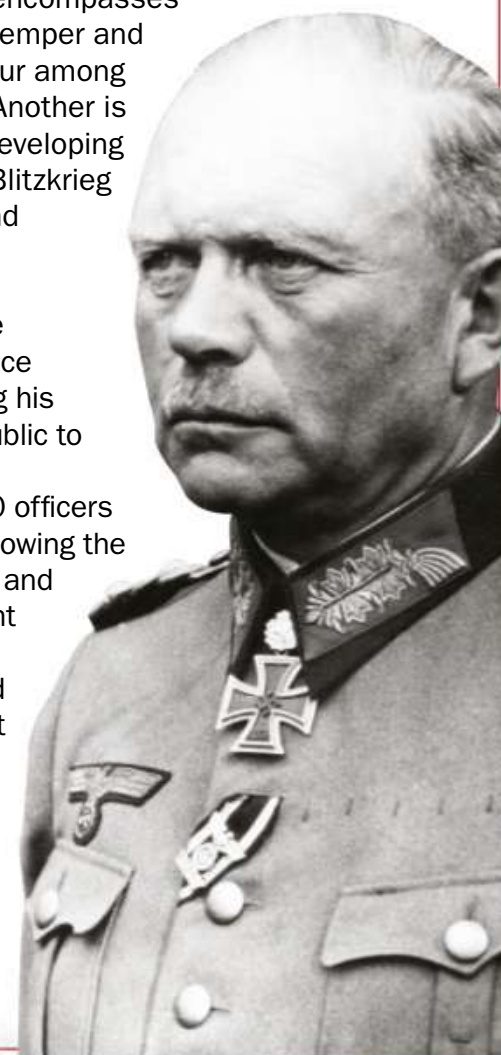
**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 1907-1945 **COUNTRY:** GERMANY

Heinz Guderian's military legacy encompasses many things. One is his reputed temper and defiant nature, currying poor favour among senior German military officials. Another is the important part he played in developing German tank tactics – including Blitzkrieg manoeuvres – during both war and peace time.

The most important, though, is his easily identifiable loyalty to the military, characterised by his service to three different ideologies during his forces career, from empire to republic to dictatorship.

Guderian was one of only 4,000 officers asked to remain in the military following the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, and carried out his military service right through World War II, developing key tank tactics along the way and utilising light tanks to complement his emphasis on manoeuvrability.

A veritable military genius, Guderian's armoured tactics were the foundation upon which Panzer operations were built, and his defiance of Hitler at a crucial moment during Barbarossa reflected his astute nature.



Winston Churchill, accompanied by Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery and Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, inspects tanks of 7th Armoured Division (the Desert Rats) in Berlin, 21 July 1945



## STANISŁAW MACZEK

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 1914-1947

**COUNTRY:** POLAND

Defeat is a bitter pill to swallow. Some men succumb to it easily, others learn from it and adapt. Despite his efforts, Stanisław Maczek had to watch his besieged country fall into German hands in 1939, throwing the entire world into an inescapable state of violence, fear and uncertainty.

During Hitler's push into Poland, Maczek was ordered to move his 10th Motorised Cavalry Brigade into positions to defend the southern flank of the encircled Polish forces, only equipped with light tanks and smaller vehicles. He faced off against several Panzer squadrons, slowing the German attack considerably. Unfortunately, the Panzer divisions broke through, and it wasn't long before Poland fell into Axis hands.

Despite this, Maczek fought valiantly for the rest of the war, embodying the courageous and indomitable spirit of the Polish through the countless victories that he and his men achieved during the course of the war.



## KURT KNISPEL

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 1940-1945

**COUNTRY:** CZECHOSLOVAKIA (SUDETEN GERMAN)

Even though Kurt Knispel didn't enter military service until 1940, and made his name in heavy Tiger and King Tiger tanks, his preceding years were spent completing tank training in the comparatively lithe Panzer I and Panzer II. This basis in armoured tactics proved indispensable throughout his career – one that ultimately resulted in Knispel becoming the highest-scoring tank ace of World War II.

At the time when Hitler made the fateful decision to invade the Soviet Union in 1941, Knispel manned the turret of a far heavier Panzer IV during the initial German assault into the seemingly unconquerable territory. Following this, he took command of Tiger tanks and their bigger brother, the fearsome Tiger II. During these years, Kurt Knispel earned 168 confirmed kills of enemy vehicles (although the number may be as high as 195!), cementing his position as a fearsome gunner, and a worthy commander to boot.



## SYDNEY VALPY RADLEY-WALTERS

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 1940-1974 **COUNTRY:** CANADA

Nicknamed 'Rad', Sydney Radley-Walters developed a reputation as an effective military leader during World War II and a man that was popular among his men.

An officer with the 27th Armoured Regiment (The Sherbrooke Fusilier Regiment), Rad's strong interpersonal skills came to the fore in the aftermath of the D-Day landings of 1944, where their iconic Shermans, supported by M3 Stuart light tanks, found themselves face-to-face with the Waffen SS, caught in the hard slog that was Bernard Montgomery's misjudged Battle for Caen.

During the second half of 1944, Rad and the brave men of the Canadian Army faced off against Panzer divisions regularly, and there are many who claim that a Sherman Firefly under his command killed the famous Michael Wittmann. It was also the Sherbrooke Fusiliers that came to the rescue of the US 101st Airborne during the unsuccessful Operation Market Garden.



27th Sherman 'Bomb' was the only Canadian tank to fight from D-Day to VE-Day uninterrupted

## MICHAEL WITTMANN

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 1934-1944 **COUNTRY:** GERMANY

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## 254TH INDIAN TANK BRIGADE

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 1941-1945 **COUNTRY:** INDIA

It was early 1942 when the Imperial Japanese Army invaded southern Burma and wasn't long before it had conquered the nation. Drafted in to intercept the invaders were the British, the Chinese, the US, Canada and a wealth of armies from the African continent. The British Indian Army played a crucial role in holding off the Japanese, and this particular brigade utilised M3 Stuart light tanks to outmanoeuvre and outgun the Imperial Japanese forces.

It was in 1944, when the Western Front was preparing for Normandy, that the battle for Burma reached its

climax. Japan's desire to take India thrust it into war, and two battles that took place simultaneously – and right next door to each other – resulted in the retreat of the Japanese forces. The 254th fought hard for months, cementing its reputation as an admirable armoured corps.

British commander and Indian crew encounter elephants near Meiktila







**I**t's 1940 and Britain has just weathered the first waves of the blitzkrieg storm. After the evacuation of Dunkirk, Churchill and his war cabinet have some respite to decide what is the best way to retaliate against the Third Reich. They make the decision to form an elite force that will be better than the best the Wehrmacht has to offer. The result is the creation of the British Commando regiment. The commandos would become an instrumental part of the Allied fighting force during the war. Men were recruited from all over Britain to take part in what was simply called 'service of a hazardous nature'. From D-Day to the Far East, the specialised units would become the scourge of the Axis forces. Despite initially having little training, these shock troops proved so effective that Hitler authorised the 'Kommandobefehl' (Commando Order), stating that German soldiers should eliminate any Allied special forces soldier on sight. This went directly against the original Geneva Convention and demonstrated just how these soldiers got under the skin of the Nazi hierarchy. Their job done, the British Commandos were disbanded after the war, but their role and skill set has lived on in the Royal Marines.





# 1ST NAZAIRE RAID

**28 MARCH 1942**  
**1ST, 2ND, 3RD, 4TH, 5TH, 9TH AND 12TH COMMANDOS**

The daring operation that punched a hole in the Third Reich's critically important dry dock

One of the finest acts of courage in the whole of World War II, the raid on St Nazaire was a true gamble. The best way to hurt the Kriegsmarine was to strike its dockyards, so the port became a key target for the British in what would be known as Operation Chariot.

The tricky part of the attack was reaching the harbour, as it was not exposed to open sea, so the commandos would have to navigate an eight-kilometre (five-mile) estuary as well as avoid a multitude of German anti-aircraft flak guns. Even worse, they could not use the tactic of blanket bombing due to the high number of civilians in the surrounding area, and naval support was tricky due to the narrow estuary.

Under the command of Lord Louis Mountbatten, the decision was taken to

pack the destroyer HMS Campbeltown full of explosives and ram its full bulk into the dock while commandos from the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 9th and 12th units rode alongside the vessel in small motor launches.

Despite having the cover of night and taking a variety of precautionary measures, the Germans were alerted, meaning only a few of the motor launches made it to the docks. Once ashore, the commandos and demolition squads rushed into the submarine pens to arm explosives. The main objectives were:

- Completely destroy the two caissons of the Normandie Dockyard.
- Demolish as many of the dockyard facilities as possible.
- Break down the lock gates.

**“THE TRICKY PART OF THE ATTACK WAS REACHING THE HARBOUR, AS IT WAS NOT EXPOSED TO OPEN SEA”**

## 1 AT THE HARBOUR WALLS

Approaching the port from the Loire Estuary, 16 motor launches carry 621 commandos past the sea walls and into St Nazaire. Among the commandos are demolition squads with the sole intent of destroying as much of the dock as possible before extraction.

## 2 HMS CAMPBELTOWN

Filled with four tons of explosives, the destroyer is disguised as a German Möve torpedo boat and successfully ghosts past the coastal defences. In the early hours of the morning, the alarm is finally raised and Commander Mecke orders all of the port's gun emplacements to open fire.

## 3 RACE TO THE DOCK

The British vessels respond as a crossfire ensues. Many of the motor launches are lost to the defences, but Campbeltown is the worst hit as shells pound its sides and machine-gun fire rakes its deck. It smashes into the dock at 1.34am.

## 4 BOMBING RUN

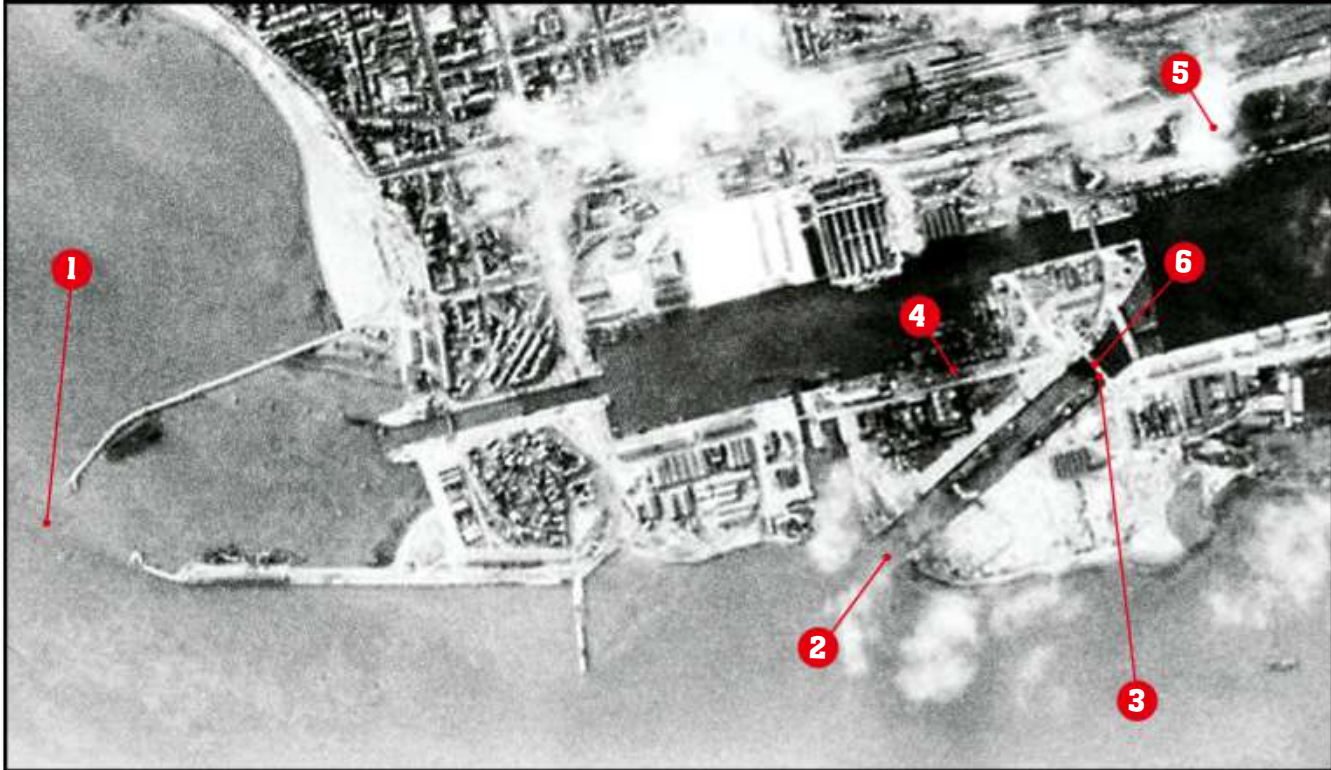
Led by Commander Ryder, the commandos and demolition squads land on the quayside. The German resistance is fierce as the British troops get to work. The primary target, the pump house, is found by a squad of four sergeants, who promptly demolish it.

## 5 BREAKOUT

With the Germans regrouping, the commandos are in trouble. As many objectives as possible have been completed, so the commandos decide to fight their way out of the town. The British record many losses, but by first light, most have escaped with their lives and the raid is over.

## 6 DETONATION

The next day, HMS Campbeltown explodes, killing over 400 German soldiers and reducing the dock gates to rubble. 59 commandos have been killed or are missing with another 109 captured. Five Victoria Crosses will be awarded.

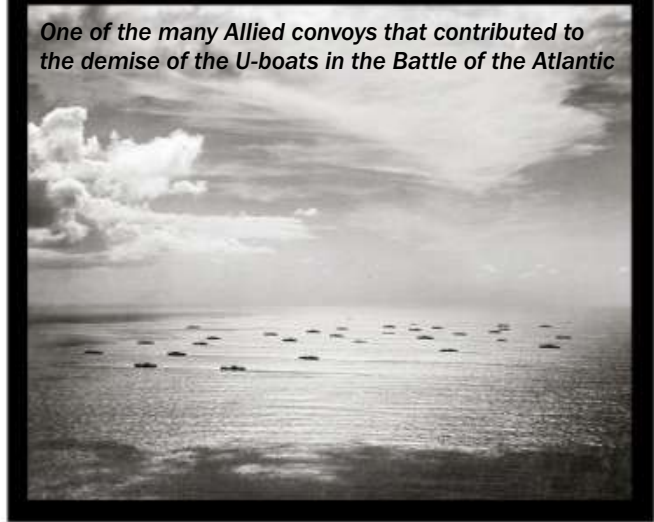


Above: HMS Campbeltown after it ploughed into the dock. The fuses didn't detonate until the next day, but the Germans couldn't haul the behemoth off the gate

## THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

The longest continuous campaign of the war, the battle for the Atlantic raged from 1939 until 1945. Hitler knew that Britain depended on its overseas allies for supplies and arms, so cutting this off would significantly restrict Churchill's options. German U-boat wolf packs were deadly in the conflict, launching at a rapid rate off the newly acquired coastal ports in Vichy France. At first, the Kriegsmarine dominated, but the tide began to turn in 1941 as the Allies managed to get on top of the U-boat threat. As the Germans retreated to Fortress Europe, it was time for the Allies to go for the jugular and hit the Axis ships where they were most vulnerable: their docks.

One of the many Allied convoys that contributed to the demise of the U-boats in the Battle of the Atlantic



## EXPERT OPINION

DR PETER JOHNSTON, NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM

**How much did the St Nazaire raid affect German operations in occupied France and the Atlantic?**  
After Campbeltown exploded, the St Nazaire dry dock was rendered inoperable for the rest of the war. This severely limited the ability of the German surface fleet to operate in the Atlantic and threaten the convoys on which Britain depended. Because of the raid, the German Navy never sent the Tirpitz into the Atlantic for fear that, if it needed repairs, it would have to return to German waters via the English Channel where the Royal Navy Home Fleet could threaten it. Instead, the Tirpitz remained in the Norwegian waters until the RAF destroyed it on 12 November 1944.

The raid also accelerated German plans for the Atlantic Wall. Ports, in particular, were increasingly fortified to prevent a repeat, and by June 1942 the Germans began using concrete to fortify gun emplacements and bunkers. While this diverted resources away from other German theatres of war, it would also make any future landing in Europe more difficult for the Allies.





2 THE COCKLESHELL HEROES

7-12 DECEMBER 1942  
HMS TUNA

Known officially as Operation Frankton, this courageous escapade involved a band of commandos canoeing 70 miles to lay charges on German ships

One of the most unusual missions of the war, Frankton is nonetheless fondly remembered for helping maintain the Allied blockade between Japan and Germany. The idea of using canoes for infiltration behind enemy lines came from the British witnessing the success of the Italian canoes in December 1941, which did major damage to the battleships Elizabeth and Valiant. By 1942, the Allied blockade on Germany was becoming less and less effective, especially at the port of Bordeaux. After deliberating the more conventional forms of assault, it was decided that canoes would be the method of attack.

Split into two divisions, the objective was to destroy German ships in the harbour. After a series of faults, only the canoes Catfish and Crayfish managed to make it to Bordeaux. While taking cover in some vegetation, the four men were discovered but managed to convince the civilians that remaining silent would be the best course of action. The two canoes pressed on for

days and eventually made it to their target on the night of 10 December. Making their way into the docks, the fuses on the limpets were set. On the next night, more mines were attached to cargo ships and patrol boats as five ships and the harbour itself were badly damaged. At one point, Catfish was spotted by a sentry, but its camouflage saved the day as the soldier turned away again. Their work done, the canoes were scuttled and the crew made a hasty escape to the safety of the Spanish border. The success of Operation Frankton is credited with helping shorten the war.



EXPERT OPINION



Winston Churchill believed the Cockleshell Heroes shortened the war by six months. How and why was it so effective? Churchill's claim may have been a little exaggerated, based on the need for propaganda in what was otherwise a dark time for the British war effort. The long-term effects of the raid were not as significant as those of St Nazaire – but they did of course have an affect on the German war machine. However, nothing should detract from the bravery of the men who carried it out. A small team that was well led, well trained and dedicated to success, inflicted damage far outweighing their small capacity. The Germans became increasingly defensive and committed more resources to guarding ships in harbour – men and material that could have been deployed elsewhere.

Left: "Of the many brave and dashing raids carried out by the men of Combined Operations Command, none was more courageous or imaginative than Operation Frankton," said Lord Mountbatten

### THE HEROES

CATFISH

MISSION SUCCESS

LIEUTENANT COLONEL HERBERT HASLER

ROYAL MARINE BILL SPARKS

CRAYFISH

MISSION SUCCESS

CORPORAL ALBERT LAVER

ROYAL MARINE WILLIAM MILLS

CONGER

CAPSIZED

CORPORAL GEORGE SHEARD

ROYAL MARINE DAVID MOFFATT

CUTTLEFISH

MISSING

LIEUTENANT JOHN MACKINNON

ROYAL MARINE JAMES CONWAY

COALFISH

CAPSIZED

SERGEANT SAMUEL WALLACE

ROYAL MARINE ROBERT EWART

CACHALOT

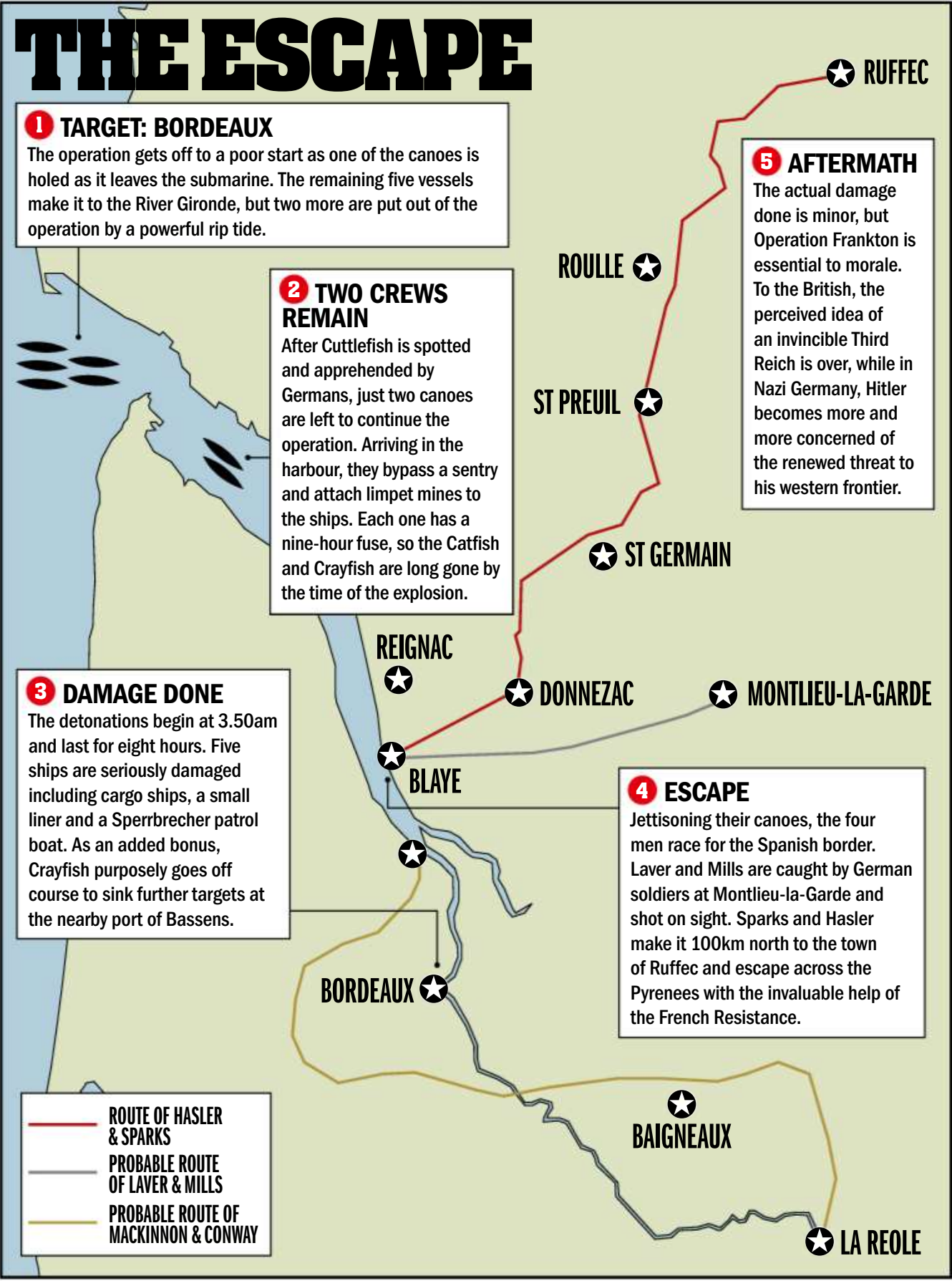
LAUNCH FAILURE

ROYAL MARINE W A ELLERY

ROYAL MARINE E FISHER

SUPPORT

ROYAL MARINE NORMAN COLLEY





## 3 OPERATION ROAST

1-3 APRIL 1945

2ND COMMANDO BRIGADE

The special service brigade helped remove German forces from Italy

On April Fools Day 1945, shortly before midnight, the 2nd Commando Brigade attacked a small bit of land between Comacchio, North-East Italy, and the Adriatic Sea. By capturing this spit and advancing, it was hoped the Germans would think the main offensive was coming from the coast, not the Argenta Gap. Commandos had to make it across Lake Comacchio quickly but it was difficult to cross. 1,200 German troops occupied the spit but within a couple of days the Brigade captured it, taking 946 German prisoners in the process.

**Below:** LTVs transport German prisoners through flooded parts of Comacchio. The town was built in a lagoon just off the River Reno



## 4 OPERATION IRONCLAD

5-7 MAY 1942

NO 5 COMMANDO

The mission to liberate Madagascar from Vichy France and Imperial Japan

Arriving at dawn on 5 May after a long journey from Britain, the surrounding area of Diego Suarez was mine-swept before the assault on the port. In the intense African heat, the commandos did battle with colonial troops before boarding HMS Anthony under the cover of darkness to attack the city's wharfs. The operation's demoralising effect on the Vichy French forces contributed greatly to the armistice signed in November that year and kept the island out of Japanese hands.

*Operation Ironclad proved that commandos could work in tropical climates just as effectively as in Europe*



## 5 OPERATION FRESHMAN

19-20 NOVEMBER 1942

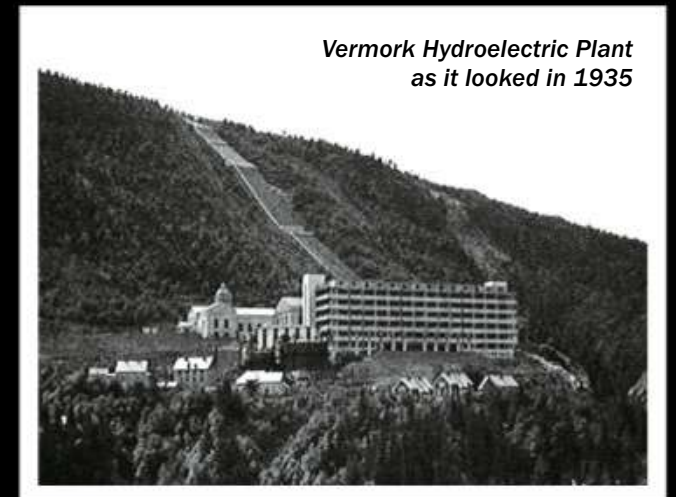
ROYAL ENGINEER COMMANDOS

The commandos are sent to Norway; their aim is to stop the creation of a Nazi atomic bomb

The Allied Manhattan Project had only started in August 1942, so it was imperative that this new threat from the Nazis was stopped imminently. Located in a Norwegian hydroelectric plant in a deep valley, the decision was taken to drop off the squads via glider on a landing zone five miles from the target. The squad of 30 would split into two and be deployed on a homing beacon-marked landing site in two Airspeed Horsa gliders. Halifax bomber planes were chosen for the mission, as they were the only aircraft in the RAF capable of towing a glider for the 400 miles required to reach Norway from Britain.

The operation was nearly postponed due to adverse weather conditions, but went ahead on the evening of 19 November. Disaster struck almost right away as the radio

**“DISASTER STRUCK ALMOST RIGHT AWAY AS THE RADIO RECEIVER STRUGGLED TO PICK UP THE SIGNAL FROM THE TRANSPONDER ON THE GROUND”**



*Vermark Hydroelectric Plant as it looked in 1935*

receiver struggled to pick up the signal from the transponder on the ground. Things got worse at about midnight as the towrope on one of the aircraft froze and snapped; many of the crew were killed and the rest were captured. The second aircraft managed to retreat back to the coast, but for reasons unknown, released the glider, which crashed into the mountainside; the crew were all killed or went missing.

There were positives to come out of the failure. The Halifax demonstrated that long-haul military flights were achievable, as was the versatility of airborne missions. The Norwegian Resistance would return a year later and successfully complete the objectives. A German atomic bomb was never made.

## WAR CRIMES AGAINST COMMANDOS

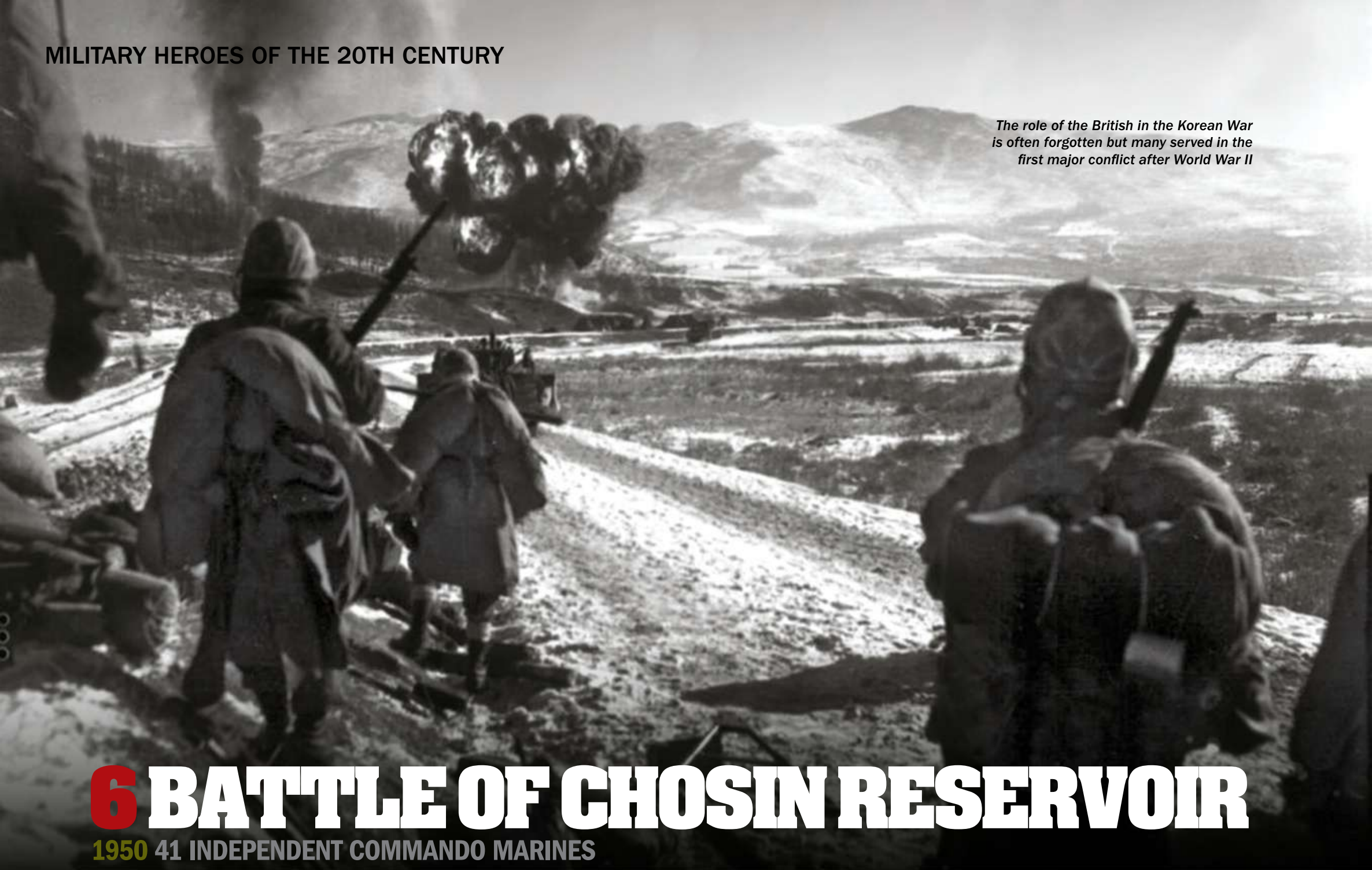
The survivors of the two crash landings were not treated well by the Gestapo. After being captured in a German-occupied town in Norway, the men of the first crash were taken to the German camp at Slettebø while the second were executed at a concentration camp at Grini. The liberation of Norway in 1945

revealed the true extent of the horror, and the Nazi personnel responsible for the killings were captured. Put on trial between 10-14 December 1945, the men, including the commander of German forces in Norway, were found guilty of war crimes. This revealed the brutality of Hitler's Commando Order.

*The concentration camp at Grini where the commandos were killed in cold blood by the Gestapo*







The role of the British in the Korean War is often forgotten but many served in the first major conflict after World War II

# 6 BATTLE OF CHOSIN RESERVOIR

1950 41 INDEPENDENT COMMANDO MARINES

Now under the command of the US Army, one of the remaining commando units took its expertise and skill set to the Far East

Barely five years after the drop of Little Boy on Hiroshima, British commandos were on the warpath once again. The majority of the commando units had been disbanded after World War II and Britain wasn't officially at war, but this didn't stop 100,000 British troops getting caught up in the Korean War. One of the remaining battalions was the 41 Independent Commando, which fought with distinction at the battle of Chosin Reservoir.

As the People's Liberation Army poured in from the Chinese border, the United Nations forces were forced to fall back to a reservoir. Led by Colonel Douglas B Drysdale, the 250 commandos fought bravely in a region dubbed 'Hell Fire Valley', but only advanced two miles in three hours as they became pinned down under

constant bombardment. Eventually, Drysdale called for reinforcement from US tanks. Jumping on the convoy, the column pressed on but was hit hard as radio communications were lost by one huge blast that split the 41 up from the rest of their allies. As the Chinese came in for the kill, the commandos barely escaped with their lives and just about made it to some respite at Hagaru-ri.

The next day the decision was taken to break out of Hagaru-ri on what would be a gruelling 38-hour march and part of a mass fighting retreat of UN troops. A pyrrhic victory for the Chinese, the battle is an enduring memory for the Green Berets, who lost 50 per cent of their men in the battle.

## BRITAIN IN THE KOREAN WAR

Sometimes considered a forgotten war in Britain, 100,000 British troops fought on the Korean Peninsula between 1950 and 1953. Under the umbrella of the UN Command, British soldiers were exposed to harsh conditions and a tough, uncompromising foe. One of the major battles involving British soldiers was the Battle of the Imjin River, where 600 soldiers from the British Army took on 30,000 Chinese troops. More than 1,000 British servicemen were captured during the war and exposed to horrendous treatment. 82 never returned home. The war resulted in huge losses on both sides and the division of Korea.

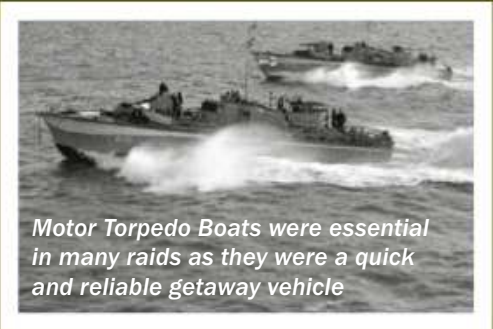
Below: Known as the 'Chosin Few', the efforts of the commandos in Korea aren't well documented



## 7 OPERATION CARTOON

23-24 JANUARY 1943 NO 12 COMMANDO

Alongside Norwegian allies, another Nazi power source is destroyed



Motor Torpedo Boats were essential in many raids as they were a quick and reliable getaway vehicle

The Norwegian island of Stord was functioning as a reliable store of iron pyrite for the Third Reich military. British commandos charged with destroying the German facilities were accompanied by ten Norwegian commandos and a convoy of seven MTBs. Carrying 50 pounds of explosives on their backs, the men yomped to the target mine, which was two miles away. The subsequent explosion put the mine out of action for more than a year. One commando was lost in the raid, but overall the mission was a great success.



# 8 BRUNEVAL RAID

**27 FEBRUARY 1942**

**C COMPANY, 2ND BATTALION, 1ST AIRBORNE DIVISION**

A smash and grab parachute drop that eliminated an important German radar location, paving the way for the Allied bombing of Europe

In previous attacks on this radar station in northern France, Flak gun emplacements had nullified the impact of bombing squadrons. The Germans boasted highly advanced radar systems that repeatedly helped knock the RAF out of the sky. As a result, British commandos

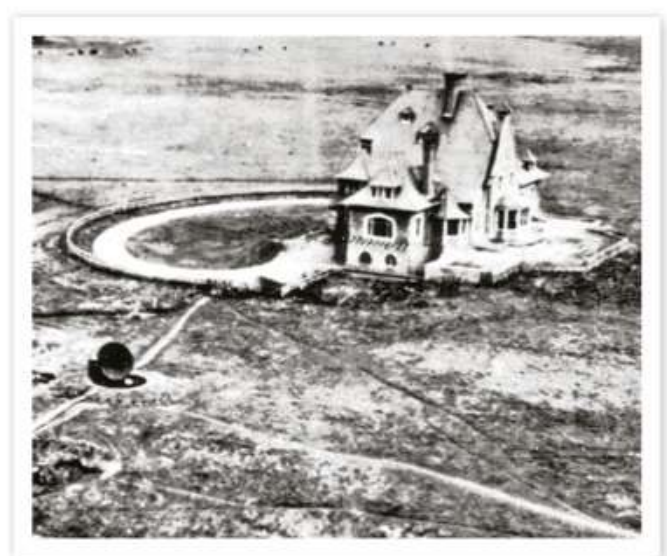
were sent on a mission that would be known as Operation Biting, or simply the Bruneval raid. Led by Major John Frost, C Company was tasked with the destruction of a house on the cliffs of Bruneval. Seemingly inconspicuous, it was actually being used as an important radio and signalling location for the Germans that acted as an early warning system of approaching Allied ships or planes.

To avoid the machine-gun posts and barbed-wire fences, C Company were dropped a fair distance behind the house, before advancing closer. Using their expert covert skills, the commandos clinically took care of business as they killed every occupant of the house.

The next part of the operation was to destroy the radio; as this was being done, German fire came in from a neighbouring farmhouse. 12 of the company dealt with the attackers, and after the dismantling of the machinery was complete, it was time for extraction. At first, no contact could be made with the Royal Navy as the relief vessels had nearly been spotted by Kriegsmarine destroyers. Finally, the boats arrived under a hail of German machine-gun fire and the commandos escaped to safety, their mission complete. A day later, a lone Hurricane flew over the area undetected – Operation Biting had been a success.



*The location was so well defended that, even for the commandos, a conventional raid was considered too risky*



*Above: RAF reconnaissance photo of the Würzburg radar array at Bruneval in December 1941*

## EXPERT OPINION



**Why was the Bruneval Raid so important to British bombing raids in Europe?**

In 1941, British reconnaissance aircraft had photographed the Würzburg radar installations, but experts in Britain were not sure what they were and how they functioned. Bomber Command was suffering heavy casualties in air raids over occupied Europe, and it was essential to understand how German defences worked so that they could be negated.

The capture of the radar enabled British scientists to analyse it and better understand it. It was this examination that confirmed to British scientists their suspicion that the Germans had developed radar that was resistant to the jamming methods that the British were currently using. A new solution was needed, and so the British put the Window countermeasure into use. The results were spectacular, and Germans were forced to develop new defensive strategies and technology.

# 9 OPENING THE STRAITS OF TIRAN

**1956 NO 40 COMMANDO, NO 42 COMMANDO, NO 45 COMMANDO**

Known as Operation Musketeer, British commandos were dropped into Egypt to protect the economic interests of their country

Arriving at first light, the Commando Royal Marines stormed the beaches using the same strategy as landings seen in World War II. Egyptian batteries were waiting for them, but the 40 and 42 Commandos were ably assisted by offshore fire, which provoked the Egyptians as they advanced.

The British assaulted Port Said, with oil tanks in the city being set alight as the port was choked by thick smoke. El Gamil airfield was captured within 30 minutes as Egyptian defences wilted in the face of expertly trained commandos and Centurion tanks. The 45 Commandos attacked Port Said in helicopters but were pegged back by heavy fire from Egyptian shore batteries, as well as some unfortunate friendly fire from British aircraft.

The unit also engaged in street fighting, but were on the receiving end of Egyptian snipers who picked them off at the city's Customs House and Navy House in particular. Some of the commandos were dropped in the wrong area, landing in a stadium under Egyptian control and having to make a hasty getaway. Port Said had been successfully assaulted

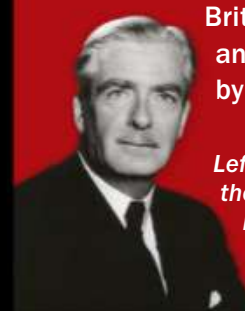
by the British, who met up with their French counterparts, ready to continue operations. Although Operation Musketeer was undertaken effectively, political issues meant Britain would never be successful in taking back the Suez Canal.

*Below: The 45 Commando assault was the first time British forces used helicopters to lift men directly into a combat zone*



## THE SUEZ CRISIS

The Suez Crisis is often seen as a black mark on Britain's history. The 164-kilometre canal was integral to world trade, and Britain and France were keen to maintain their grip on it. In 1951, Egypt, eager to gain hold of the canal, renounced the treaty it had with Britain. With two thirds of its oil imports coming through the canal, Britain was extremely concerned, and over the course of five months, sent 34,000 troops to the Middle East to protect its interests. Pressure from the UN and the USA, who were apprehensive of the conflict turning into a global war, forced Britain and France to pull out, and the canal was nationalised by the Egyptians.



*Left: The Suez Crisis wrecked the reputation of British Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden, who resigned shortly after the end of the conflict*



# THE BRITISH COMMANDO

THE UNIFORM,  
WEAPONS AND  
EQUIPMENT  
THAT MADE THE  
COMMANDOS  
A FORCE TO BE  
RECKONED WITH  
IN THE FIELD

**MACHINE GUN**

A commando would usually be armed with a submachine gun. Both the American Thompson and the British Bren were used frequently, with the Sten gun also coming into use towards the end of WWII.

**UNIFORM**

The Denison Smock uniform was designed to be tough and durable. Unlike some special forces, however, the uniform didn't differ too much from the regular army. This was so they could blend into line with the regular recruits.

**EQUIPMENT**

Lightweight shoes rather than boots were worn for use on stealth operations. A rucksack included extra ammunition, tools, rope and other equipment that could be invaluable on a mission.

**CAP**

Berets were also common, but many commandos wore caps when on missions. The warm wool was especially useful in winter operations as was the green colour for added camouflage.

**SIDEARM**

Webley revolvers and Colt 45s were both used alongside the submachine gun. For covert missions, the De Lisle Carbine was used with a silencer. The iconic Fairbairn-Sykes knife was also used when combat got up close and personal.

## 10 OPERATION COLOSSUS

General Sir John Dill inspecting the first of the British commandos parachute troops in December 1940

### 14 FEBRUARY 1941 NO 2 COMMANDO

The first British airborne raid in the heart of fascist Italy

In February 1941, 35 commandos were dropped into the heart of Axis Italy. The mission was one of sabotage, and the objective was to destroy a railway viaduct in the Apennine Mountains, north of Naples. The Tragino Aqueduct was the water supply for three Italian ports, and the operation was led by Major T Pritchard, who trained his X troop for Colossus from nearby Malta. Along with the main raid, a diversionary attack was carried out in Foggia to draw the Italians away. Back in Tragino, the commandos had dropped in and the explosives were armed and ready to go.

The huge explosion successfully eliminated the aqueduct, but the raid soon got difficult as the extraction of the men became tricky. The original plan was to evacuate the

commandos via submarine, 60 miles away, but this idea had to be abandoned when the extraction site was discovered by the Italians. There were no plans for an alternate method of withdrawal, so the men were forced to split into four groups and escape across the countryside on foot.

Slowed down by the need to stay hidden in farms and small villages, they were soon all captured. The Italian spy and interpreter Fortunato Picchi, who was working for the British, was tortured and executed, while the others were sent to POW camps.

The mission was a success, but the aqueduct was soon repaired, nullifying the damage of the explosion and the mission. However, the operation proved that commandos could (and would) cause havoc behind enemy lines for the remainder of the war.

## THE ALLIES IN ITALY

Always the junior to Hitler's Germany, Italy's war effort never really got going. In fact, Mussolini's failures in the Balkans meant German troops had to bail the Italian Royal Army out, spreading their forces thinly in other areas. After various commando skirmishes, the full invasion of Italy began in January 1943 as Allied divisions moved up through Sicily. Operation Husky was a huge success as the Duce was deposed within six months. The push northwards was more difficult as German troops fiercely defended northern Italy and the new Salo Republic, as the Allies neared the Alps and the border with Austria.

American troops in Italy are pinned down by the city of Lucca in Tuscany





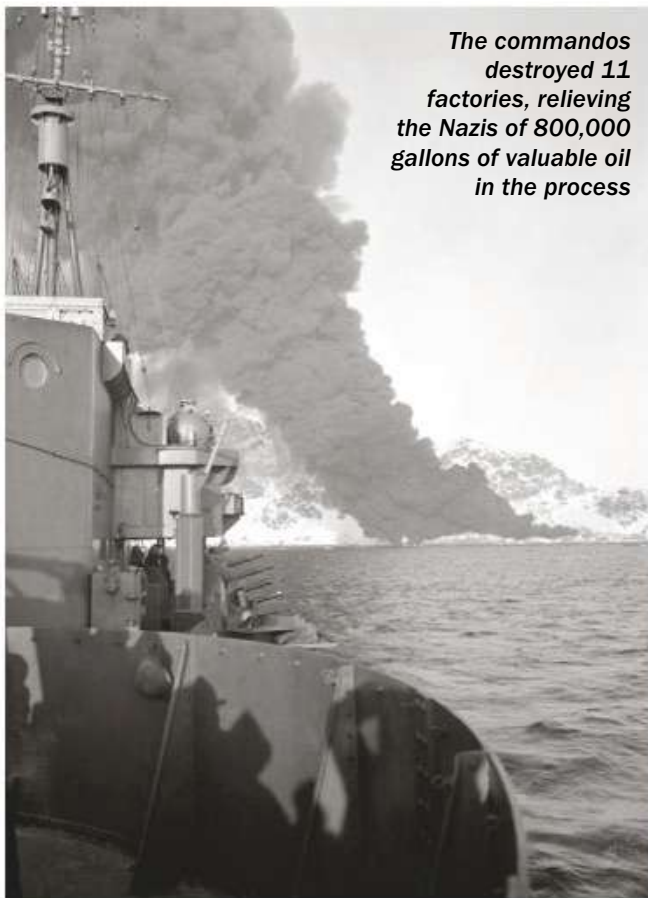
# 11 OPERATION CLAYMORE

**3 MARCH 1941** NO 3 COMMANDO, NO 4 COMMANDO

The first of two British raids on the strategically important archipelago off the coast of Norway

The Lofoten Islands were home to several German glycerine factories that supported the manufacture of weapons for the Third Reich. To put an end to this armament production, 500 commandos were sent to destroy the plants. After a three-day journey

*The commandos destroyed 11 factories, relieving the Nazis of 800,000 gallons of valuable oil in the process*



where seasickness ravaged the men, the British arrived on 4 March. Lowered down onto thick ice, the commandos stormed into the German compounds, completely surprising the Wehrmacht soldiers stationed there. Advancing through the chilly environment, the commandos swiftly rounded up the defenders and set charges on factories, military buildings and ships. 225 Germans were taken prisoner with the loss of no commandos. It has been reported that the local Norwegians were so happy at the sight of Allied soldiers that they offered ersatz coffee to them all.

The mission was such a success that the British saw the event as an ideal opportunity to poke fun at the Nazis. Lieutenant RL Wills sent a mocking telegram to 'A. Hitler' in Berlin saying: "You said in your last speech German troops would meet the British wherever

**"LOWERED DOWN ONTO THICK ICE, THE COMMANDOS STORMED INTO THE GERMAN COMPOUNDS, COMPLETELY SURPRISING THE WEHRMACHT SOLDIERS STATIONED THERE"**

## EXPERT OPINION



How much did the commando raids in Norway affect the Nazi war machine? Commando raids in Norway had a significant affect on the Third Reich's war machine, and had important knock-on effects with other theatres of war. They provided an opportunity to gather intelligence through captured prisoners and restore British morale. The forays helped capture a set of rotor wheels for an Enigma machine and its codebooks. This meant that the British could read German naval codes at Bletchley Park, providing the crucial intelligence that helped British convoys avoid German U-boats.

Similarly, Operation Gunnerside in 1943, which was run by the British using Norwegian commandos, saw the targeting of the Norwegian heavy water production facilities to slow German development of an atomic bomb. These raids also helped stretch German military resources from other theatres. After Operation Archery, the Germans sent 30,000 troops to Norway to upgrade coastal and inland defences.

they landed. Where are your troops?" If the operation couldn't have gone well enough, as an added bonus, the commandos came across some spare rotors for a German Enigma machine, which were sent straight to Bletchley Park for study by Alan Turing and his team.

## NORWAY UNDER THE NAZIS

When Hitler concocted his plans for European domination in the Führerbunker, Norway was right at the top of his list. With its extensive coastline, the country was an ideal base for the Kriegsmarine to launch its Atlantic operations. As well as their location, Norway and Sweden were also rich in ore for the Nazis to use in their war machines. Britain was aware of Hitler's desires but powerless to resist them as Operation Weserübung was launched.

Norway fell quickly, and under Operation Alphabet, Allied soldiers left Norway in the summer of 1940. The commando raids, such as the one at Lofoten, were part of renewed efforts to take back Scandinavia.

*Below: German troops occupied Norway for the majority of the war with many Norwegians (later known as quislings) collaborating with the Nazis*



# 12 OPERATION FLIPPER

**10-18 NOVEMBER 1941**  
NO 11 COMMANDO,  
NO 7 COMMANDO

The audacious attack on the headquarters of the Desert Fox

A huge gamble to kidnap or kill Field Marshal Rommel, the attack would be made 250 miles behind enemy lines. 27 men landed, exhausted and soaked by heavy rain. Using a local Arab shepherd as a guide, the commandos trudged through mud for days before reaching a cliff side. It was here that they were spotted by a watchdog and the alarm was raised. Their stealth compromised, the commandos came under fire and were forced to retreat after suffering many casualties. After the operation, the news came that Rommel wasn't even in his HQ that day, adding further to the failure.

*Right: His leadership of the Afrika Korps and popularity in the Wehrmacht ranks made Rommel a major Allied target*





# 13 LITANI RIVER

**9 JUNE 1941 NO. 11 (SCOTTISH) COMMANDO**

With Vichy France in control of Lebanon and Syria, the Allies needed to ensure that the Nazis were unable to stage attacks on Egypt from the Middle East



*Commandos deployed to the Litani River on HMS Glengyle*

With France divided between its occupied northern territories and the Germany-appeasing Vichy government in the south, many former French colonial properties were now in the hands of a key Nazi ally. These included Lebanon and the Syrian Republic. The latter had nominally been an autonomous state since 1936, but was treaty-bound to allow the French government to maintain troops and airfields within its borders. With Vichy France functioning as a puppet state for Nazi Germany, the Allies were concerned that this treaty would allow German troops to stage attacks on Egypt. Operation Exporter aimed to prevent this.

C Battalion, No. 11 (Scottish) Commando, were to land on the northern bank of the mouth of the Litani River in southern Lebanon and take a nearby bridge, giving the main Allied force a safe crossing. Despite errors, including one of the three commando teams landing on the wrong side of the river, the destruction of the bridge itself, and the loss of their commanding officer, after 29 hours of battle against French Algerian troops, the outnumbered commandos had held out long enough for the main force to cross via a hastily erected pontoon bridge. News from the Syrian front was suppressed, as it was thought that the sight of Vichy French troops fighting against the Allies would be bad for morale.

**“AFTER 29 HOURS OF BATTLE AGAINST FRENCH ALGERIAN TROOPS, THE OUTNUMBERED COMMANDOS HAD HELD OUT”**

## 14 OPERATION DRYAD

**2-3 SEPTEMBER 1942 NO 62 COMMANDO**

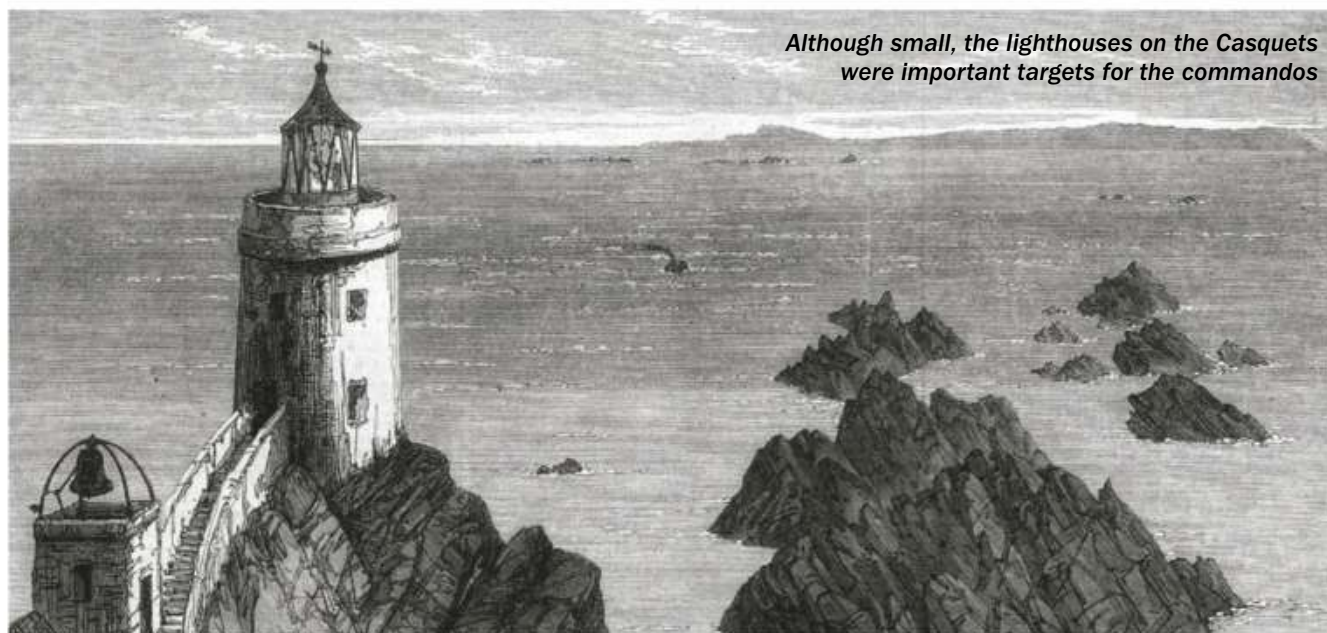
A daring assault on a rocky Channel Island outpost

The closest Hitler ever came to a conquest of Britain was the Channel Islands. The Casquets off Alderney were home to a German naval signalling station and also some secret codebooks. An attack on the complex had been attempted many times prior to September 1942, and this time a commando team was assigned to the task. The lighthouse was protected by razor-sharp rocks that were a magnet for shipwrecks, but the commandos managed to scramble onto land after disembarking a torpedo boat 800 yards from the shore.

With the noise from the waves covering their movements, the 12 men scaled the cliffs up to the walls of the compound. The seven German defenders were armed with Steyr rifles and

grenades, so stealth was key. With a mixture of tactical espionage and German slackness (the defenders were either asleep or not willing to resist), the lighthouse was captured without a shot being fired. However, the raid was not over.

Upon leaving the rock, one of the commandos, Adam Orr, jumped aboard the escape boat, knife in hand, and in the choppy water stumbled into one of his fellow marines, Peter Kemp, stabbing him in the thigh. Worse still, another one of the group, Geoff Appleyard, broke the tarsal bone in his ankle when he slipped down from a rock. The mission complete and the injured safely aboard, the prisoners were interrogated upon the return to the mainland and provided the British with valuable information on German positions, movements and staffing.



*Although small, the lighthouses on the Casquets were important targets for the commandos*

## THE CHANNEL ISLANDS UNDER THE NAZIS

Undefended after the majority of residents were evacuated, the Channel Islands were assumed into the Greater German Reich in the summer of 1940. Under Nazi rule, every Channel Islander was issued with a new form of ID while anyone of British descent was deported to Germany. Alderney was home to the only concentration camps constructed on British territory and were built by Nazi slave labour. There was no official resistance movement on the islands, although ammunition was stolen from the Germans, and after the islands' liberation in 1945, all Nazi collaborators were arrested or even attacked.

*Below: Nazi Germany saw the Channel Islands as part of the Atlantic Wall, so fortifications and batteries were built*





## 15 ASSAULT ON WALCHEREN

1944

### 4 SPECIAL SERVICE BRIGADE

With D-Day over, the Allied companies advanced even further into German-occupied Europe, meeting more fierce resistance as they went

Antwerp was a major target for the Allies. Home to one of the biggest ports in Europe, its occupation was key to increasing the pressure on the shrinking Third Reich. However, the holding of the port was useless without access to the mouth of the River Scheldt. Walcheren was an island that was heavily fortified by the Germans with bunkers and coastal guns, and it prevented mines being cleared to allow ships in to the river estuary.

The island would be attacked under Operation Infatuate with a pincer movement from two directions. From the south, the commandos of 4 Special Service Brigade would attempt an amphibious landing while being supported by Canadian troops from the north. A gap in the dyke had been formed by earlier RAF bombing, and the Royal Navy drew German fire away from the infantry. The tower at Westkapelle was the first to fall, followed by a radar station.

The next objective was the batteries, which were eventually taken after many commando casualties. With only one battery left to take, the German commander negotiated the surrender of his remaining 4,000 troops in the area. The mission was complete, but before the day was over, disaster struck as one of the amphibious landing vehicles ran into a mine. 18 men were killed with a further nine wounded. The loss of life put a sour note on what was a tough yet successful operation.

*The Anglo-Canadian operation was part of the much bigger Battle of the Scheldt, which opened up the port of Antwerp up to the Allies*



*The commandos were met with stiff German resistance, but every Wehrmacht soldier in Norway was one less on the Eastern Front*



## 16 THE MÅLØY RAID

27 DECEMBER 1941

NO 2 COMMANDO, NO 3 COMMANDO, NO 4 COMMANDO

The British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force combine forces to smash the morale of the Germans in Norway, with commandos leading from the front

By Christmas 1941, the Wehrmacht had occupied Norway for more than 18 months. In this time, the Germans had extracted copious amounts of ore to fuel their armed forces. To strike back, the Allies launched Operation Archery on the islands of Vågsøy and Måløy alongside Operation Anklet on the nearby Lofoten Islands.

The raiding force was a hybrid of three commando units and a Royal Norwegian Army Group totalling 525 men. There were no Axis warships to combat, but the Wehrmacht 181st Division, along with substantial fortifications and air support, would be a tough nut to crack. Finishing up their Christmas dinner on HMS Kenya, the troops were deployed. The first move was taken by the Royal Navy, which opened fire on the coastal defences, followed by the RAF, which provoked the Luftwaffe into action while also creating a smoke screen for the commandos to advance under. Initially surprised, the Germans fought back with force but their resistance was stifled by the British floating reserve that blocked reinforcements coming from the north of Vågsøy. The commandos escaped having killed 150 Germans and taken 98 prisoner. They were also joined by 71 Norwegians who were fleeing their occupied country.

The results were not limited to land, as nine ships were sunk and four aircraft downed. The Måløy Raid was a successful precursor to Operation Claymore and demonstrated that the British Armed Forces could work together in one cohesive unit.

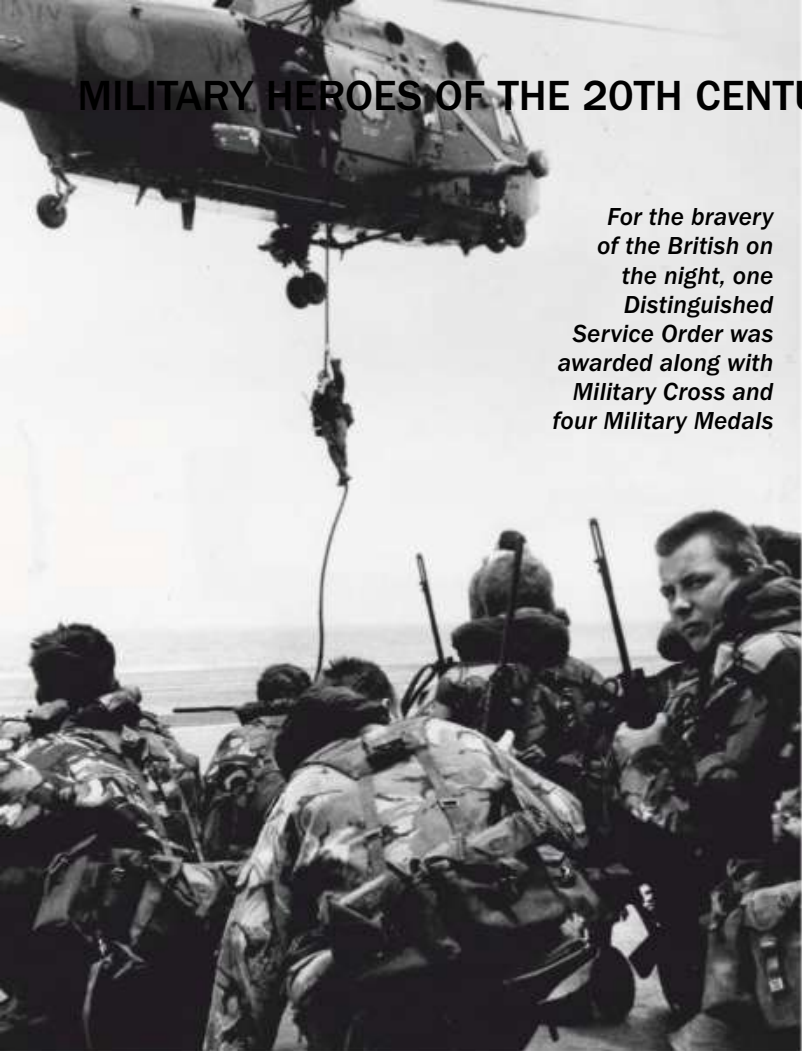
## MORE GERMAN TROOPS ON THE WESTERN FRONT

The attacks on Norway prevented the Nazis from acquiring more resources from the country, but also eased the pressure on the Soviet Union. Operation Barbarossa was still raging on and Stalin was getting desperate as Moscow came under siege. The success of the commandos in Norway provoked the Nazi hierarchy into pumping more troops westwards rather than east. The Atlantic Wall was reinforced with 30,000 extra men as Hitler realised the importance of holding onto Scandinavia. The next summer, the decisive Battle of Stalingrad began as the Red Army started to turn the tide. The decline of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front owes a lot to the commandos in the west.

*Commandos watch as an ammunition dump in Vågsøy burns*







For the bravery of the British on the night, one Distinguished Service Order was awarded along with Military Cross and four Military Medals

# 17 BATTLE OF MOUNT HARRIET

11 JUNE 1982 42 COMMANDO BATTALION

If the Falklands War were to have a quick resolution, the commandos needed to be at their best up on Mount Harriet

Mass disarmament and demobilisation after World War II meant the numbers of commandos began to dwindle during the 1950s. However, in the modern British military, all Royal Marines are commando-trained, meaning the distinction between the two titles has been blurred significantly. One conflict in which this new wave of commandos excelled was during the Falklands War. 3 Commando Brigade was one of the few units that survived the cutbacks and were a major part of the landing force in Operation Corporate. On 11 June, 42 Commando Battalion were tasked with securing Mount Harriet, on the road to Port Stanley.

Supported by 29 Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery and the Welsh Guards, 3 Commando Brigade assaulted the Argentine positions in

the hills. Traversing through tricky minefields, a full-frontal attack was considered too risky, so instead they undertook a flanking manoeuvre. Artillery fire from captured weapons, so as to make the Argentines believe it was their men doing the firing, reinforced the commandos.

The main battle began at 10pm and four mortar positions were cleared in 45 minutes. Six Argentines were killed with more than 20 captured. Supported by invaluable 'bunker buster' fire from the artillery, the British worked their way around the mountain towards Goat Ridge and Mount Tumbledown. Two British soldiers died that night, Corporal Laurence G Watts and Acting Corporal Jeremy Smith, but the objective was complete as the road to Stanley appeared ahead.

## EXPERT OPINION



How were the commandos who served in the Falklands War different from those in World War II? How had their training/equipment/role progressed? After World War II, most commando units were disbanded or re-roled, leaving just 3

Commando Brigade of the Royal Marines.

However, while only 3 Commando Brigade were official commando units, the two Parachute Regiment battalions – 2 and 3 Para – that were sent south as part of an enlarged 3 Commando Brigade had very much retained the commando ethos. Their training still taught them physical and psychological endurance, the need to be aggressive, and the ability to strike hard and fast at the enemy. Also, while armed with modern equipment and weaponry, the style of operations that 3 Commando Brigade conducted as part of Operation Corporate remained much the same as those of their World War II forebears; coastal raiding, infantry assault and combined operations were all vital in securing victory.

### 1 THE ARGENTINES PREPARE

Seeing Mount Harriet is a key area, the Argentines heavily reinforce it. Extensive minefields are placed to the south and the west while firing positions are built into the slopes.

### 2 THE BRITISH STRATEGY

Emerging from Mount Challenger, 42 Commando harass the Argentines from the west. This is a deliberate ploy to make the enemy believe that a full-frontal assault is coming from Mount Challenger. In fact, a flanking attack is being planned.

### 3 COMPANIES ON THE MOVE

Advancing from the east and west respectively, K and L Companies prepare to engage the enemy. J Company provides back-up fire from Mount Wall to the west as a diversion. After an hour's delay to locate a lost platoon of Welsh Guards, the code word 'Vesuvius' is uttered and the battle begins.

### 4 ASSAULTING THE HILL

Four Argentine mortar positions are cleared within 45 minutes, but Larry Watts is struck down by fire. The troops are making good ground, and whenever their progress is checked, artillery is called in to help. At times, both Argentine and British shells fall together, causing confusion on both sides.

### 5 SEIZING THE INITIATIVE

The companies show great bravery and even greater skill during the battle. Machine-gun positions and bunkers are taken out swiftly and accurately, with 66mm anti-tank rockets and phosphorous grenades proving extremely effective. After six and a half hours of fighting, Mount Harriet has been taken.

### 6 ONWARDS TO GOAT RIDGE

An artillery barrage on Goat Ridge had flushed the Argentines out of their positions, so it is deserted once the British arrive. With all objectives complete, a few more outposts to the north and south have to be taken before the final push to Stanley.

## THE TWO LOSSES AT MOUNT HARRIET

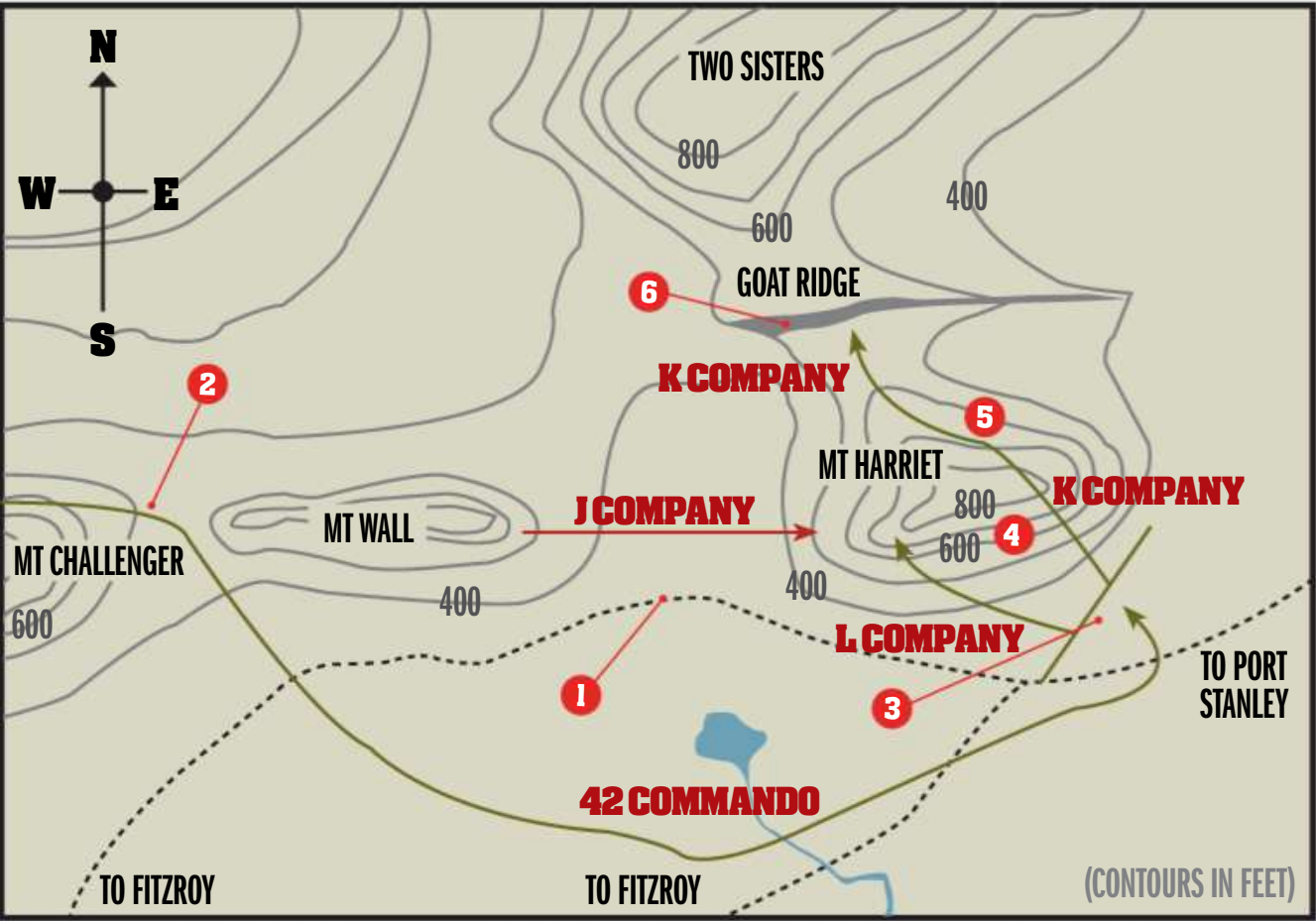
LAURENCE G WATTS  
CORPORAL 42 COMMANDO,  
ROYAL MARINES

A section commander on the day, Corporal Watts was engaged in the lower-eastern positions of the battle. He was killed when he attempted to attack a tented position. He was 27.

JEREMY SMITH  
ACTING CORPORAL  
42 COMMANDO,  
ROYAL MARINES

Advancing through a hail of gunfire, 23-year-old Corporal Smith's 66mm anti-tank rocket was shot just as he was about to pull the trigger.

'The Yomper' statue stands in Portsmouth in memory of the 225 British servicemen who lost their lives in the Falklands War







## 18 OPERATION AQUATINT

12-13 SEPTEMBER 1942 62 COMMANDO

The often-forgotten pre-D-Day commando raid on Normandy

*Lessons learned from failed missions, such as Aquatint, helped D-Day become the success it was*

Three weeks after the disastrous events at Dieppe, the British were keen to bounce back. Operation Aquatint was essentially a small-scale D-Day. On the night of 12 September, the commandos landed at St Laurent to the east of Cherbourg. Their Motor Torpedo Boat (MTB) emerged silently from the mist as they clambered into a Goatley to make the short distance to the shoreline. It was just after midnight when pistol and machine fire began to rain down from the village above the beach. Illuminated by a German searchlight, the Commandos were peppered with fire. Worse still, the gunners had spotted the MTB and began firing on what was the commandos' only

means of escape. Now in a state of panic, the British servicemen scrambled into the Goatley and went back out to sea while still under fire.

As the commandos hurried back, shells flew over their heads towards the MTB. Luckily, none of the projectiles hit their target. After the barrage had stopped, the MTB sneaked back to the beach to extract any stranded commandos but eventually had to retreat back to Portsmouth harbour as morning broke. The raid was a disaster. 11 of the men would never return to British shores. Another failure so soon after Dieppe was damaging to British morale and the commandos had to pick themselves up for the tougher operations that lay ahead.

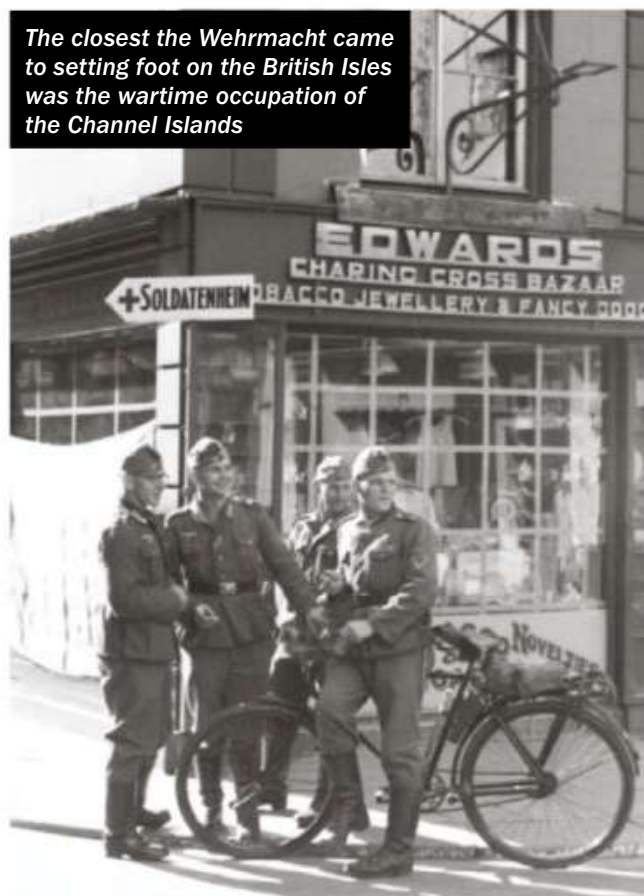
## 19 OPERATION AMBASSADOR

14-15 JULY 1940 NO 3 COMMANDO

One of the earliest commando operations focused on the Channel Island of Guernsey

In July 1940, the British Commando regiment was barely a month old. The objective of Ambassador was to destroy German aircraft on Guernsey, with 140 men landing at three separate points of the island. Advancing inland, the commandos found that their reconnaissance had failed them and the Germans were in completely different positions than first thought. With incorrect planning, the commandos made a swift retreat back to their boats. This retreat would prove disastrous as gunner John McGoldrick was lost and presumed drowned. Operation Ambassador represented a huge learning curve for the commandos.

*The closest the Wehrmacht came to setting foot on the British Isles was the wartime occupation of the Channel Islands*



## GOATLEY BOATS

Used most famously by the Cockleshell Heroes, the 'Goatley' proved to be an effective vessel for a variety of commando missions. Designed by Fred Goatley of the Saunders-Roe marine engineering company, he met with Major Herbert Hasler, one of the Cockleshell Heroes, to discuss his invention. For amphibious operations, the British required a strong, light and collapsible craft that could be used with stealth. With a wooden bottom and canvas sides, the Goatley was ideal. 1,000 were ordered by the War Office and each boat could be assembled in just two minutes by two men. It would become invaluable.



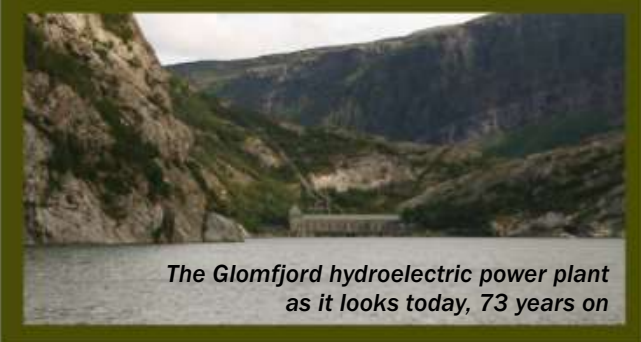
*Silent but deadly, the Goatley could get commandos as close to their target as necessary*

## 20 DISASTER IN THE FJORDS OF NORWAY

20 SEPTEMBER 1942  
NO 2 COMMANDO

Operation Musketoön demonstrated that not all the commando missions in Norway went to plan

Norway was a frequent target for the commandos, and Operation Musketoön was no different. This time the objective was a hydroelectric plant in Glomfjord. The ten commandos were accompanied by two Norwegian corporals on the mission as they were transported via submarine to what was a remote fjord. The factory was destroyed, but this time not all the commandos managed to escape. Seven were captured and taken to Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. Under the Commando Order, they were executed on 23 October 1942.



*The Glomfjord hydroelectric power plant as it looks today, 73 years on*



*This propaganda poster from England encouraged support for the Résistance, saying it "helps throttle the Boche"*



**FRENCH RESISTANCE**  
**HELPS THROTTLE THE BOCHE**



# DARK SECRETS OF THE REAL FRENCH RESISTANCE

WORDS JACK GRIFFITHS

Under the oppression of Nazi occupation and the Vichy state, the fight for France was taken up by Frenchmen, women and foreigners alike

**H**itler humiliated France. Defeat in just six weeks and the establishment of the Vichy puppet state brought the country to its knees and its military reputation to ruin. As the Nazi war machine took its blitzkrieg to the rest of Europe, the French found their society taken over by German soldiers. The sheer ferocity and resounding success of the attack had shocked the French people, and before any thoughts of striking back were even comprehended, civilians had to adjust to the new regime.

With the army forcibly reduced to a mere 100,000 men and Marshall Pétain's Vichy government gradually becoming more unconvincing, pockets of opposition began to appear in many parts of occupied France. Known in popular memory as La Résistance Française, the well-known story tells of the

inspirational leadership by exiled general Charles de Gaulle, who roused French men and women with regular motivational broadcasts from across the Channel.

The Gaullist movement assisted the Allies in liberating France, and since then, the image of a Frenchman with machine gun in one hand and cigarette in the other has come to personify the resistance movement in France. Filmmakers were everywhere in the capital on the day of liberation, documenting what was seen by the international audience as La Résistance's finest hour.

However, historical revision has challenged this view, and this idea of the Résistance has become known in some quarters as the 'Gaullist myth'. Contrary to popular belief, there were many different factions involved in La Résistance, each comprising different religions and cultures. They also came from all across

*Right: A French resistance partisan armed with a Sten gun, one of the Résistance's preferred weapons*

**"WE LIVED IN THE SHADOWS AS SOLDIERS OF THE NIGHT, BUT OUR LIVES WERE NOT DARK AND MARTIAL... THERE WERE ARRESTS, TORTURE, AND DEATH FOR SO MANY OF OUR FRIENDS AND COMRADES, AND TRAGEDY AWAITED ALL OF US JUST AROUND THE CORNER. BUT WE DID NOT LIVE IN OR WITH TRAGEDY. WE WERE EXHILARATED BY THE CHALLENGE AND RIGHTNESS OF OUR CAUSE. IT WAS IN MANY WAYS THE WORST OF TIMES AND IN JUST AS MANY WAYS THE BEST OF TIMES, AND THE BEST IS WHAT WE REMEMBER TODAY"**

– JEAN-PIERRE LEVY, LEADER OF THE FRANC-TIREUR





the political spectrum. After the war, de Gaulle and his allies were keen to minimise the efforts of the lesser-known resisters, in particular French communists, to give the new French Fourth Republic as much political leeway as possible in the Cold War to come.

In recent years, the politics of memory has come to the fore in an attempt to realise the efforts of these lesser-known groups and how the Résistance was not just a national rebellion, but part of a European-wide anti-Fascist drive to erase the Nazis.

The defence of their homeland was a patriotic reflex for only some of the French citizens. What is often forgotten in the post-1945 fanfare of Allied victory is that many of the French initially tolerated or even collaborated with the Nazis. One example is the right-wing military group known as the Service d'Ordre Légionnaire, which was created by war veteran and far-right leaning Joseph Darnard. This group wholeheartedly supported the Vichy

*Right: De Gaulle addressing the people of France on one of his many radio broadcasts from across the Channel. Just how many French heard his motivational words is widely debated*

government and even participated in aiding the German occupation by rounding up Jews.

This assistance to the Third Reich wasn't limited to just France either – the 6,000 men from the Légion des Volontaires Français, or Charlemagne Division, went as far as joining the Wehrmacht and fighting in the USSR after the opening of the Eastern Front.

The vast majority of the French weren't National Socialists of course, and their non-resistance came from the fact that they simply weren't ready to risk the dangers involved in an uprising. They knew the danger was great and did what they could just to survive by keeping their heads down, following Nazi policies as an act of self preservation. Co-operation with the Nazis was also motivated by economic reasons, and by April 1942, French industry had secured



German contracts to the tune of 2.36 billion Reichsmarks. Anyone who wasn't willing to live in a Nazi state fled south across the demarcation line between Vichy and Occupied France. 8 million refugees made the journey, stuffing all they could fit into cars and train carriages. The French Third Republic was over.

In the safety of Britain, de Gaulle believed he was the self-appointed leader of the Free French but very few tuned in to his famous radio appeal on 18 June 1940, and many acted on their own accord and with their own political

**“HATRED TOWARDS THE GERMANS INCREASED DRAMATICALLY OVER THE COUNTRY AND SOME THINGS AS INNOCENT AS A FRENCH GIRL BEING TAKEN TO THE CINEMA BY A WEHRMACHT SOLDIER OUTRAGED FRENCHMEN”**

# ✚ FORGOTTEN HEROES OF THE RESISTANCE

WHILE DE GAULLE WAS ACROSS THE CHANNEL IN THE SAFETY OF LONDON, THESE COURAGEOUS INDIVIDUALS WERE SLUGGING IT OUT AGAINST THE WAFFEN SS ON THE STREETS OF FRANCE

## GUY MÔQUET

A relatively unknown figure, Môquet was executed at the tender age of 17. Beginning his life of activism as a child, he distributed leaflets filled with anti-Nazi propaganda around marketplaces and cinemas. He was arrested in October 1940 and was one of the revenge victims killed in retaliation to the murder of Karl Hotz.



*Môquet is remembered mostly for his emotional final letter to his family once he found out he would be executed*

## VIRGINIA HALL

Virginia Hall was a talented speaker of many languages, so the American was naturally an ideal choice for the Résistance. Residing in France when the war began, she was forced to leave the country by suspicious Germans in 1942 but returned as a valuable spy for the OSS.



*Hall was known by many aliases including the 'lady with the limp' due to her wooden leg*

## BORIS VILDE

Saint Petersburg-born and Estonian-raised, Vilde first came to Paris in 1934. When war broke out, he became part of the Résistance and utilised his skills in linguistics to help produce the anti-Nazi newspaper *Résistance*. Sadly, his group was infiltrated by Vichy supporters and he met his end before a firing squad in February 1942.



*The linguist was so influential that he is credited with introducing the word 'resistance' into the Estonian language*

## NANCY WAKE

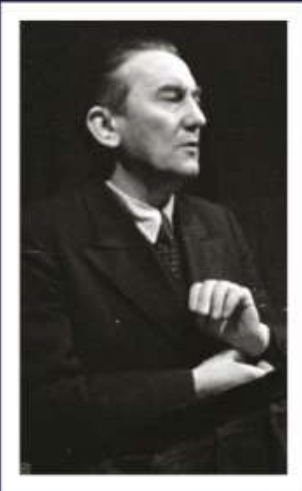
Known as the White Mouse due to her ability to avoid capture, Wake parachuted into France as part of the SOE and became a courier and a saboteur for the Résistance. Reportedly killing an SS guard with her bare hands, she became the Allies' most decorated servicewomen of the entire war.



*At her most dangerous, Wake was top of the Gestapo's Most Wanted list and had a 5 million franc bounty on her head*

## FRANZ DAHLEM

Dahlem was a German veteran of World War I who had dedicated himself to communism after the war. Fleeing to France, he discussed the idea of creating a 'German Popular Front' against National Socialism but was captured and sent to Mauthausen concentration camp for the remainder of the war.



*Dahlem was part of the KPD (German Communist Party) in exile during the war*

## ADRIANA SCRIBINA

Scriabina was the co-founder of the Armée Juive Zionist resistance movement. Her pseudonyms included Sarah Knut and her activism helped organise the Jewish resistance movements in France. She was killed by the Milice in 1944 and received the Croix de Guerre and Médaille de la Résistance posthumously.



*Originally a poet from Russia, Scriabina ventured west as a refugee and became involved in Jewish underground movements*



and social agendas. In fact, he had next to no input for the first year of German occupation. Many had expected the new leader of the Vichy government, Philippe Pétain, the hero of Verdun, to have an ace up his sleeve, but when it became clear that this was not forthcoming, the resistance began.

Beginning as a working-class movement for young men, it is estimated that only up to five per cent of the French population were active resisters, but many others passively opposed the Vichy regime by turning a blind eye to Résistance activities. Hatred towards the Germans increased dramatically over the country and some things as innocent as a French girl being taken to the cinema by a Wehrmacht soldier outraged Frenchmen. These experiences made the Résistance a shared vision and it became an alliance that turned into a community. It never put forward a particular political solution or constitutional framework, it was simply a way of restoring national pride and self respect.

### Many faces of resistance

The different factions that arose fought for very different visions of the world. After the failure of Operation Sealion, it became clear that the British wouldn't be defeated so easily and plans were hatched by the different groups to fight back. The Vichy government complied with its

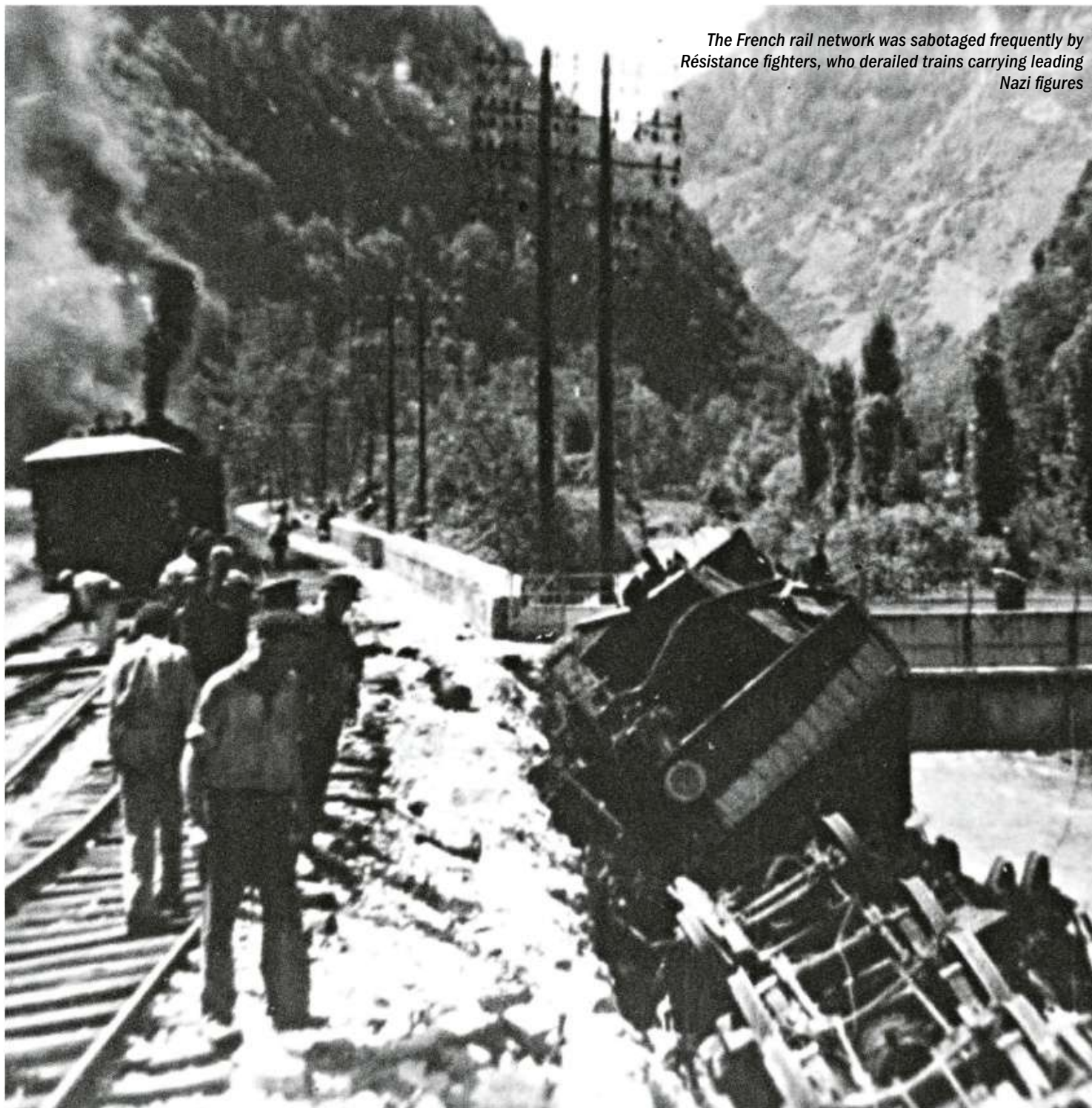
new overlords and instructed the population not to fight against the Germans, preventing as many troops as possible from leaving the country to take up arms against the Axis in another Allied military.

The French even had to pay the Wehrmacht's occupation costs. As people began to realise that the occupation was the beginning of a forced change of culture into the German Volksgemeinschaft, the rebellions escalated. On 11 November 1940, this anti-German sentiment increased further as French students were apprehended while trying to lay a World War I commemorative wreath at the Arc de Triomphe. Slowly but surely the movement took flight and, to begin with, most acts would be undertaken in secret. A small circulation of anti-Nazi graffiti and leaflets would barely make a dent in the German occupation.

As citizens began to share beliefs, co-ordinated efforts took shape. In the north, the Confrérie Notre-Dame (Notre-Dame Brotherhood), and Alliance groups sprang up, while in the south, Libération-Sud (Liberation South), and Franc-Tireur (Free Shooters, Mavericks) were founded. One group, Défense de la France, was run by students and operated out of a basement below the geology department of their school.

On the whole, the more southern areas of France were less active as they were hesitant

*The French rail network was sabotaged frequently by Résistance fighters, who derailed trains carrying leading Nazi figures*



# THE MILICE: THE ANTI-RESISTANCE

**A SELECT FEW WHO TOOK UP ARMS  
ON THE SIDE OF THE WEHRMACHT**

The collaborationist militia, the Service d'Ordre Legionnaire, had been in existence since the initial invasion of France, but by 1943 it had morphed into the more radical Milice. The group was led by Joseph Darnand, who took a personal oath of loyalty to Hitler and received the rank of Sturmbannführer in the SS. By 1944, the initial 5,000 members had swelled to 35,000 as the group helped the Gestapo hunt down resisters. They were known for being ruthless, taking no prisoners, torturing anyone who didn't comply and even shooting Résistance members who were in hospital. Just one of the counter-resistance movements, but by far the largest, spies from the Milice helped arrest Jean Moulin and several agents from the SOE-sanctioned Prosper Network, whose headquarters was infiltrated by the Sicherheitsdienst (SD).

The Milice often came into contact with the Maquis, with the former often claiming the upper hand as they were supported by the Wehrmacht. The Maquis were an easy target for the Germans and several massacres occurred, as they weren't recognised as a military so weren't under the same regulations as soldiers. The Milice found themselves isolated when the Germans began to retreat and many fled to the Reich. Those who stayed were dealt with harshly after liberation.

**“THEY WERE KNOWN FOR  
BEING RUTHLESS, TAKING  
NO PRISONERS, TORTURING  
ANYONE WHO DIDN'T COMPLY  
AND EVEN SHOOTING  
RÉSISTANCE MEMBERS WHO  
WERE IN HOSPITAL”**

*Below: Members of the Milice proudly carry captured British Bren guns and Lee-Enfield rifles*





to fight a war and invite German occupation. The largest organisation, Libération-Nord, was set up in the north. The brainchild of activists Christian Pineau and Robert Lacoste, the group had close ties to French trade unions and its origins were signed off by the ‘manifesto of the 12’, which included ten trade unionists from the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) group.

The communists within France also set up a nationwide organisation known as the Front National and swiftly established themselves as one of the most violent groups operating. These organisations often fought among themselves, as they tussled to be the major faction, and it wasn’t until later in the war that they would be united under one banner and the common goal to liberate their nation.

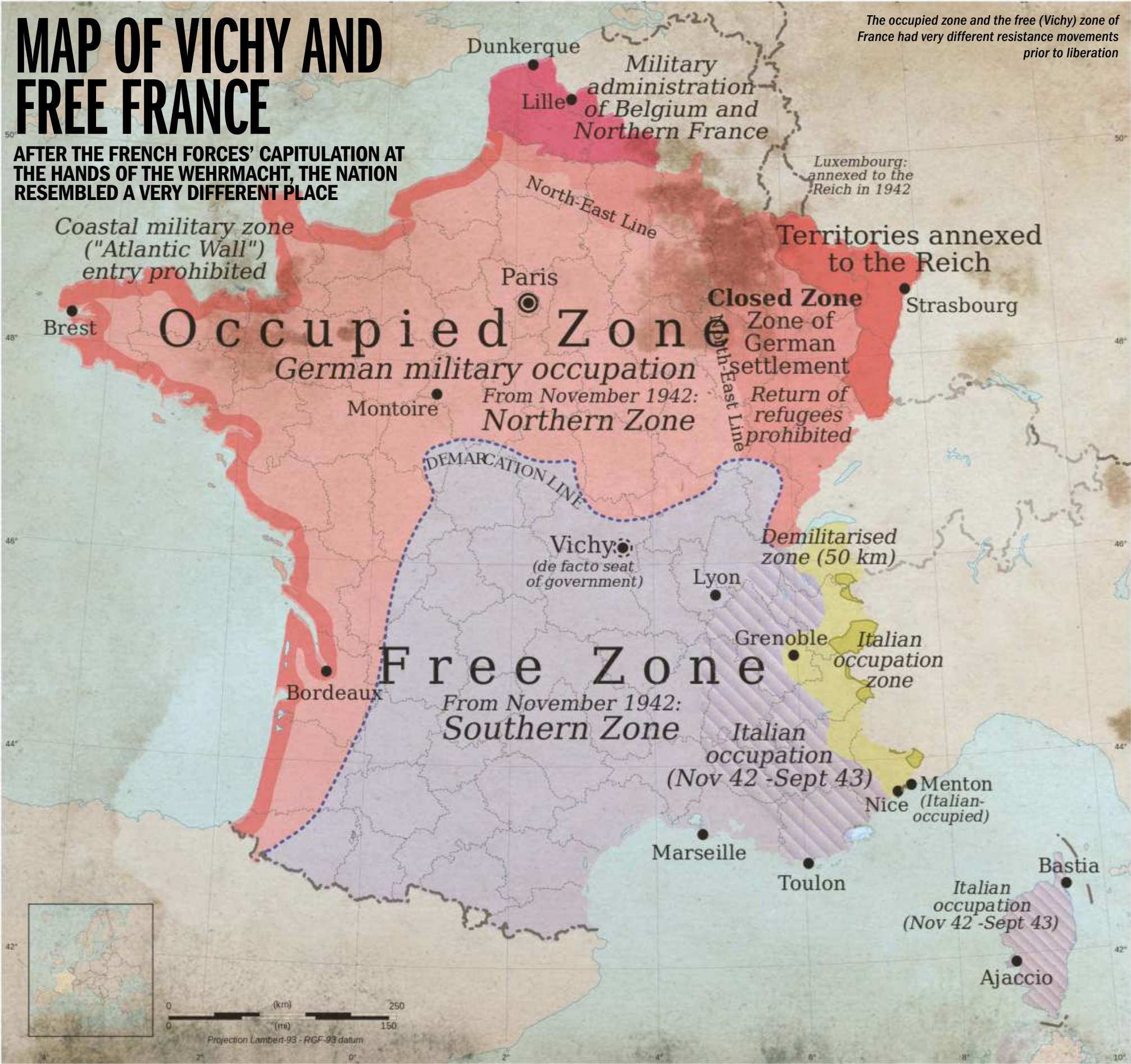
Resistance groups were both violent and non-violent. One of the first major organisations to give any sort of payback was the railway

workers’ group, les Cheminots. Their key positions in France’s public transportation system meant that they could contribute to the spreading of anti-German literature and the escapes of Résistance members.

By purposely diverting freight to incorrect locations, weakening cement by ‘sweetening’ it with sugar and causing derailments by being lax on signals, groups such as the Fer Réseau (Iron Network) were formed as the majority of the opposition concerned itself with wearing the German patience down over time.

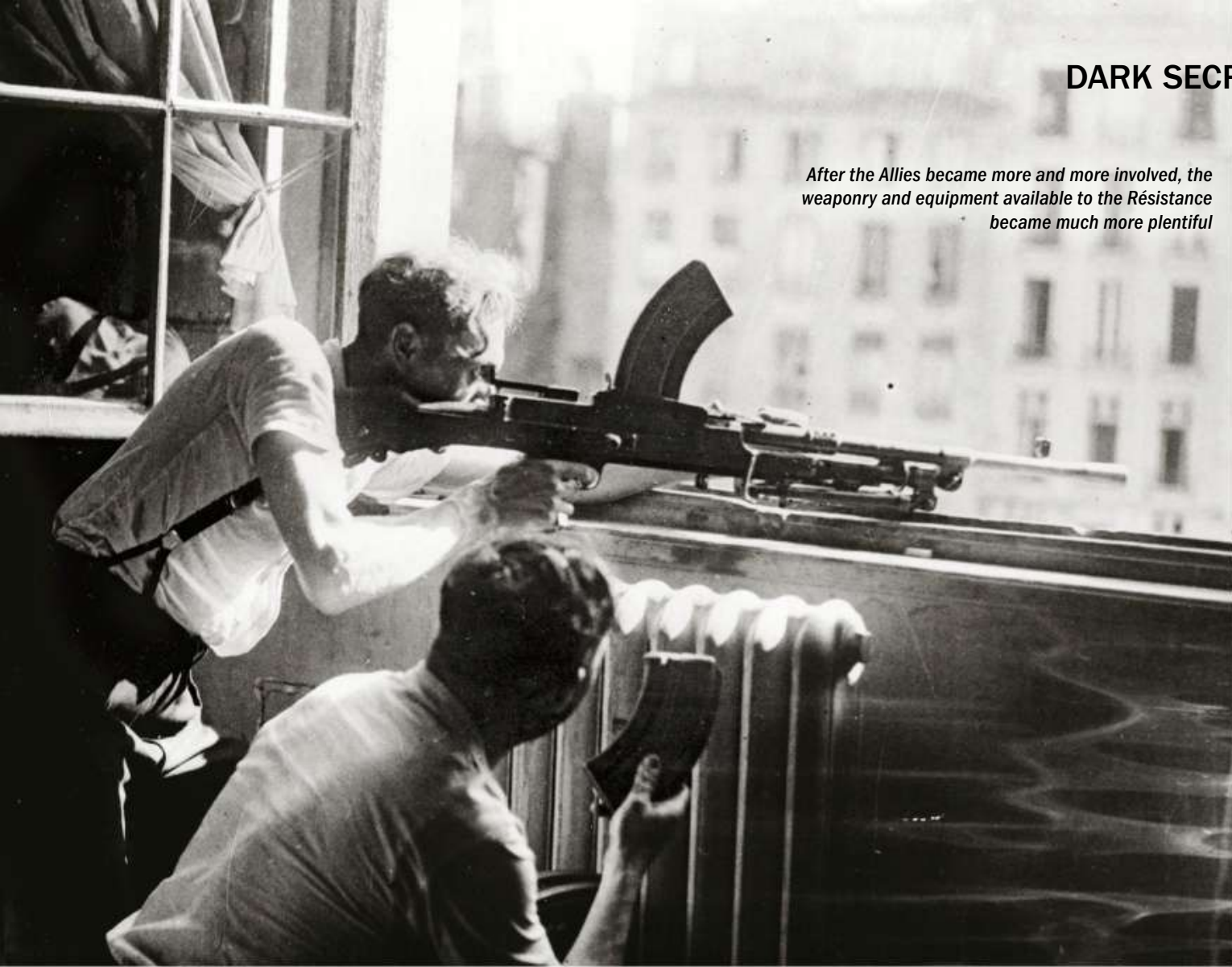
Underground newspapers such as *Libere-Toi!* (*Free Yourself!*) and *Sous La Botte* (*Under The Boot*) were published in the north by the end of 1940, as word began to spread on how best to make life difficult for the occupiers. Even classical texts from French authors came back into circulation to help inspire French nationalism. Dissent via the press was

“THESE ATTACKS WERE MET WITH DISDAIN BY THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION, WHO DID NOT WANT TO SEE INNOCENT LIVES BEING LOST FOR A CAUSE THEY DID NOT FULLY SUPPORT. AT THIS TIME, THE MAJORITY OF RESISTANCE STILL ADVISED AGAINST VIOLENCE”





*After the Allies became more and more involved, the weaponry and equipment available to the Résistance became much more plentiful*



common practice in France and the publication of literature was an efficient way of galvanising people to rise against the Reich.

Music was also important and *Le Chant Des Partisans* (*Song Of The Partisans*) became the unofficial anthem of the Résistance. However, it wasn't long until the Germans cracked down on this discontent. Anyone found would be arrested and deported to a work camp, but these threats didn't stop the movement, and over time its methods of defiance began to branch out.

Individual acts of sabotage became frequent and a popular form of insurrection was the cutting of telephone lines. This resulted in the deaths of many German personnel who were subsequently not informed of incoming RAF bombing raids.

**Below:** The Vichy authorities were intent on bringing down the Résistance and published many propaganda posters to tarnish the freedom fighters as criminals

One group that quickly made itself invaluable was the Cadix Team – a group of Poles who had made their journey west after the fall of Poland. They passed on their knowledge of how to crack the enigma machine onto their western allies. The group dissolved after its members were captured, but despite being tortured, they never gave away their secret.

As the war in Europe began to escalate, Allied pilots were shot down over the skies of France. They would be smuggled into neutral Switzerland or Spain by the Résistance and given fresh instructions on German military strategies to take back to Allied command.

One of the main organisations that took part in this was a group of French Zionists known as the Armée Juive (Jewish Army), who specialised in smuggling Jews over the Pyrenees. Saving the pilots was undertaken using a number of ratline escape routes, and as soon as the Allies got wind of this rapidly rising movement (approximately 28,000 fugitives were smuggled across the French-Spanish border alone), they sent the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) to help co-ordinate future operations. Now, some of the groups answered directly to these Allied organisations. The first SOE agent dropped into France in May 1941, and it was clear that the age of La Résistance was here to stay.

### From annoyance to threat

On 22 June 1941, the anti-Nazi movements received a boost as all the communist factions within France, in direct response to the launch of Operation Barbarossa, merged into one group. This immediately increased the group's political muscle as the communists took the fight back to the Nazis with direct orders from Moscow ordering the group to disrupt the Third Reich's military.

The Feldkommandant of Nantes, Oberstleutnant Karl Hotz, was assassinated on 20 October 1942, and the group boasted that they were killing more than 500 German

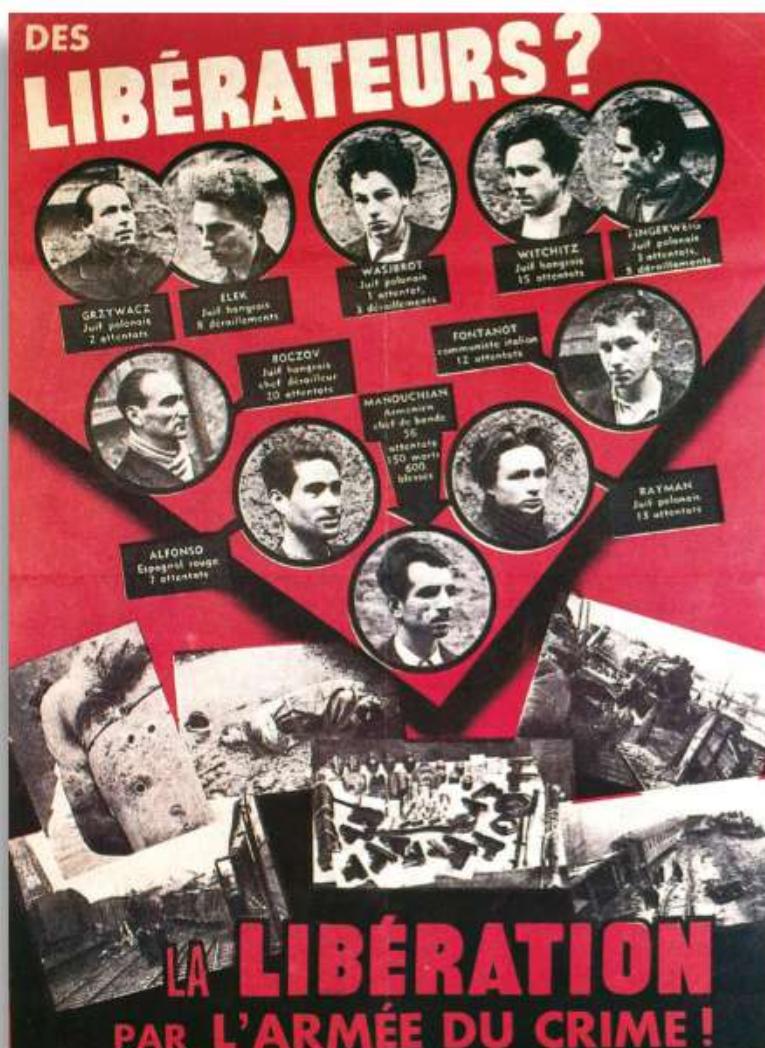
## WOMEN OF THE RESISTANCE

**WITH MEN A TOP TARGET FOR ARREST, THE WOMEN OF THE RÉSISTANCE BECAME INVALUABLE**

The role of women was essential to the development of resistance movements in France. 'Madame Lauro' was one fighter who, working alone through the night, would pour hydrochloric and nitric acid on German food supplies in freight cars on the railroads. There weren't just lone fighters though. Marie-Madeleine Fourcade became head of the Alliance Réseau and frequently rendezvoused with the British over supply drops. Her codename was Hedgehog, and after being captured, she escaped prison by squeezing through the bars of her cell window. Another important female was Dédée de Jongh, who was part of the Belgian resistance group Réseau Comète (Comet Line). Prior to her capture she was invaluable in creating and maintaining the escape lines constructed for downed Allied pilots.

Sadly, the Gestapo soon caught on to their actions and 12 SOE agents were executed at Dachau and Natzweiler. After the war, the Résistance helped politicise women in France and in 1946, 5.4 per cent of the deputies elected to the National Assembly were women. The Gaullist myth is not the only part of French Résistance history to be revised, and feminist historians have written many texts, explaining how the role of women was much greater than many were led to believe.

**Below:** The partisan in this image is known simply as 'Nicole'. She captured 25 Nazis in the town of Chartres and poses here on 23 August 1944





soldiers a month. The German reaction to Hotz's death was severe and 50 French hostages were executed immediately as a result. These attacks were met with disdain by the majority of the population, who did not want to see innocent lives being lost for a cause they did not fully support. At this time, the majority of resistance still advised against violence. Underground press and industry sabotage were, at this time, still the main way of fighting back, and anti-Nazi propaganda could now be frequently found on train carriages and in apartment foyers.

As 1941 wore on, SOE agents and Résistance fighters were beginning to communicate freely and coded messages from the BBC were filling the airwaves. There were also now defectors from the Vichy cause. Henri Frenay, a former member of the Vichy administration, began publishing his own underground newspapers. He became so disillusioned that he created his own resistance group: Combat. These added defectors initiated a counter-resistance movement as the Wehrmacht and Gestapo began to rule with an even tighter iron fist. Food was rationed further and access to cars was severely limited to the French. As the Gestapo mobilised, many Résistance fighters fled to the forests of several unoccupied zones for safety and to regroup.

By the summer of 1942, even with the added Gestapo presence, French discontent

had begun to boil over. One of the first examples of open dissatisfaction was on 14 July, Bastille Day in France, where hoards of people took to the streets in national colours. 66 demonstrations took place, but the event was overshadowed two days later by the so called 'Vel d'Hiv Roundup', which saw German soldiers take thousands of Jews into the Parisian cycling stadium, the Vélodrome d'Hiver, for deportation to Auschwitz.

This event demoralised support for the Vichy and Nazi regimes even further, but the demarcation line was proving to be one of the toughest obstacles for a national resistance movement. Naturally, the spread of propaganda and ideology in the occupied north was much trickier, but many also still supported Pétain even if they weren't pro-German. The Résistance realised that battling against the Germans also meant fighting what Vichy stood for: complete collaboration with the Third Reich.

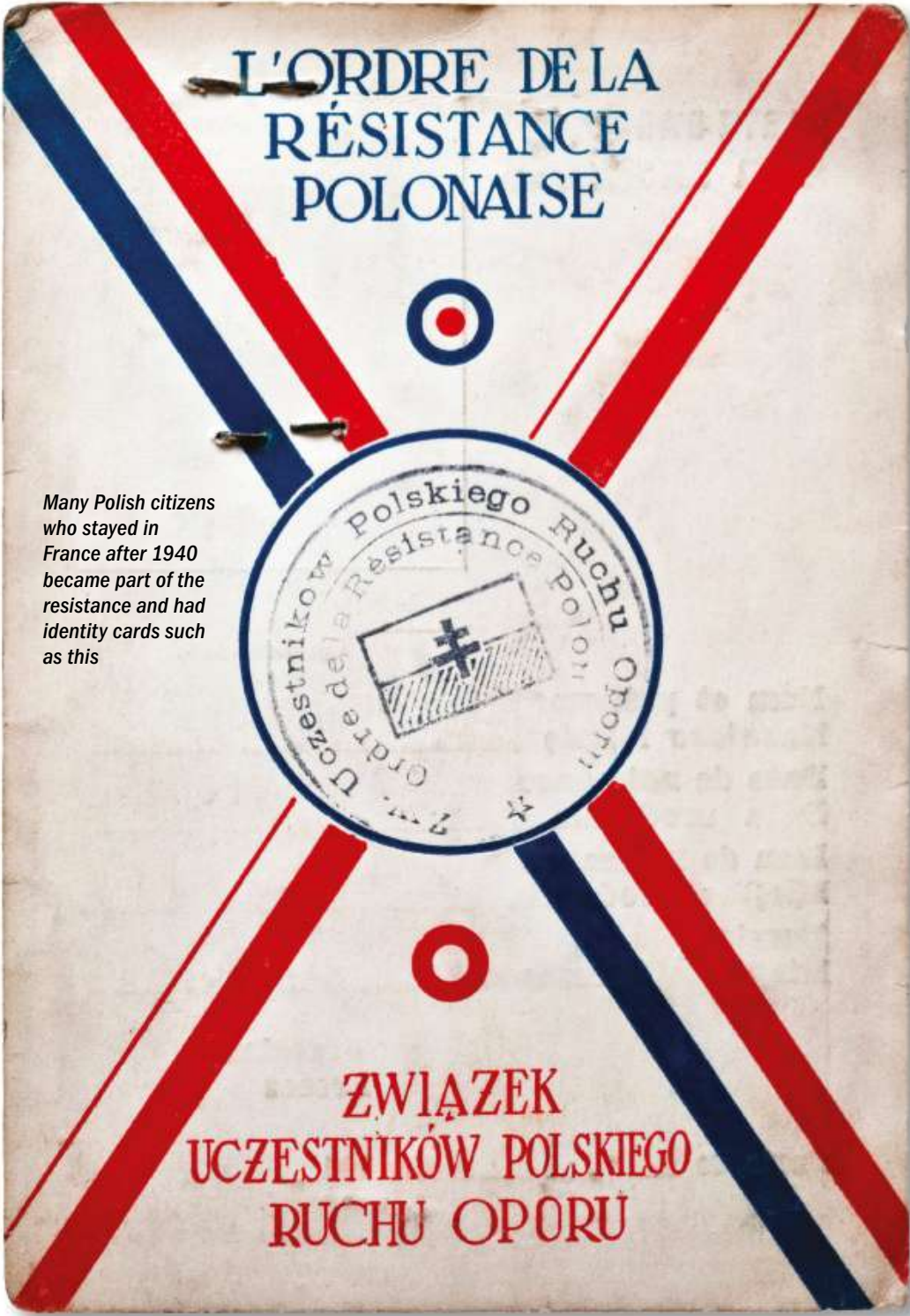
Throttling the Boche

It wasn't only French citizens and the SOE who were getting involved. Albert Guérissse was a member of the Belgian resistance and went under the alias of Patrick Albert O'Leary. Guérissse helped establish the PAT line, which became another effective means of transporting downed pilots to safety. Pilots from as far afield as New Zealand benefitted

from one of these lines, with Kiwi RAF pilot John Morris reliant on one after his burning fighter fell from the sky. Help also came in the shape of Rene Guiraud – an American spy who came to the fore after the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) became involved in the resistance movement in 1943. Guiraud parachuted into France along with his radio operator to collect intelligence and sabotage German military units. He managed to assemble 1,500 guerrilla fighters and utilised the men to develop complex intelligence networks. He was eventually caught and sent to Dachau and sadly, as Guiraud was dressed as a civilian, he was technically an illegal combatant, denying him POW rights under the Geneva Convention.

Dachau is infamous for its treatment of Jews in particular, but the most common place for a captured French Résistance member to end up was in Natzweiler-Struthof, a camp in the Alsace. The Nacht und Nebel (Night and Fog) directive against political activists was decreed by Hitler and an estimated 24,000 anti-Fascist fighters (and roughly 56,000 French fighters) from all over Europe were sent to the camp, as for the first time resistance became a truly continental movement.

The Résistance had many Jewish members. Andre Scheinmann escaped Nazi Germany after Kristallnacht in 1938 and, learning that his parents had been imprisoned at Auschwitz,



Many Polish citizens who stayed in France after 1940 became part of the resistance and had identity cards such as this



Above: A captured Résistance fighter. The German caption read: "This communist leader is on the wanted list. His papers prove his affiliation with terrorist groups"

Below: An example of a Résistance card that was used to help identify combatants and what group they belonged to





# WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT OF LA RÉSISTANCE

WITH THE MILITARY OUT OF THE PICTURE, THE FRENCH FREEDOM FIGHTERS WERE FORCED TO USE WHATEVER FIREARMS THEY COULD LAY THEIR HANDS ON



## WELROD CONCEALED PISTOL

The Welrod was a bolt-action pistol designed by the British. They came into the hands of the Résistance through Allied airdrops that arrived from Station IX, a top-secret commando equipment-making base in England. An assassin's pistol, the silencer and its compact design made it ideal for covert missions.

## STEN GUN MK 5

Used from the summer of 1944 onwards, the Sten gun was one of the most effective submachine guns. Cheap and simple, it was ideal for the Résistance and was capable of taking on the MP40 wielded by the Wehrmacht. The MK 5 was the fifth incarnation of the gun and proved invaluable in the later years of the war.

**"ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE SUBMACHINE GUNS"**

## FP-45 LIBERATOR

As the US forces made their way into Europe, they were intent on arming anti-Nazi groups with firearms. One of the most popular weapons was this small, slightly crude pistol. The FP-45 was only a stopgap and its main function was to help the Résistance to access better Axis weapons.



## KAR98K

When British supply drops weren't available, the Résistance would scavenge whatever firearms they could find. Homemade explosives were popular but stealing weapons such as the Kar98k and MP40 off the German occupiers was also popular practice, aggravating the Germans as an added bonus.



## MK 111 SUITCASE RADIO

For the SOE agents in France, this was their main means of communication, and espionage was often as important as weaponry. Used in unison with hidden compasses, miniature telescopes and maps, the suitcase radio enabled the different factions to keep in touch and helped co-ordinate the different movements.

**"FOR THE SOE AGENTS IN FRANCE, THIS WAS THEIR MAIN MEANS OF COMMUNICATION"**





the former French Army soldier joined up as an interpreter. He worked his way up the hierarchy to become second in command of a network of 300 spies. Using his position in the French national railroad to his advantage, he helped gather information on German troop movements in weekly bulletins. Eventually, the Gestapo got wise, but by the time he was sent to Natzweiler, Scheinmann's work was done. He survived the camp and was awarded the Legion of Honor and the Médaille de la Résistance by the French government after the war.

The camp's most famous inmates could well have been World War I veteran General Charles Delestraint and former commander of the French Seventh Army Aubert Frere. Both served in the Résistance; Delestraint was recruited in 1942 and tasked with commanding the Armée secrète, while Frere was leader of the Organisation de résistance de l'armée (ORA). Many of the prisoners at Natzweiler had links to a group known as the Maquis.

The main arm of violent response in France, the group's origins date back to the spring of 1942, when these freedom fighters sprung up primarily in the Limousin and Puy-de-Dôme regions. Further down the line, they spread to other areas of France and became renowned for their vicious attacks on German forces. If any French POWs escaped the camps, they would frequently end up joining or re-joining the Maquis as they sought retribution.

### United factions

The British were hesitant to give de Gaulle the position of power he desired. Churchill and Roosevelt never trusted him fully and after the disastrous defeat of an Anglo-French force at Dakar in September 1940, the French general

was temporarily frozen out of all military planning.

De Gaulle's contact with France was limited, and in reality he knew very little about the actual resistance movements that were going on in the country. When he announced in October 1941 that he would now direct resistance in France under the new Comité Français de Libération Nationale, there was still quite a way to go for Anglo-French movements to be properly co-ordinated.

De Gaulle's pipe dream would only be properly realised after he had assigned a lieutenant, ex-civil servant Jean Moulin, to undertake his orders in France. As Moulin met with the leaders of the southern resistance groups, Combat, Libération-Sud and Franc-Tireur all came under the umbrella of the Armée secrète. Somewhat reluctantly, a compromise was made for the Résistance leaders to recognise de Gaulle as their leader in return for much-needed material aid from London.

The Résistance had always felt under supplied and under appreciated by the Allied powers, so to bring the faction leaders round to his way of thinking, de Gaulle wrote the 'Declaration to the Resistance Movements' in June 1942, pledging his commitment to 16 resistance organisations for a post-war French



**Left:** The Médaille de la Résistance was given out to many major figures after the war but its selective distribution helped the Gaullist memory choose who to honour and who to neglect

democracy. The communists were the only group not to acknowledge the new pact, nevertheless, the Moulin-led Conseil National de la Résistance (CNR) was in place by mid-1943, and the final stage of resistance could begin.

The escalation of Nazi atrocities encouraged more and more violent responses, and the north in particular became a war zone. The Bruneval Raid provided a

chance for the new form of resistance to prove itself, as French intelligence reports allowed British commandos to plan their attack on a radar installation in immaculate detail that would never have been achievable otherwise. It was only in 1943, when Nazi forced labour began to severely affect France, that the majority of the population wanted to completely remove the Germans. This came shortly after Vichy ended and the Wehrmacht occupied all of France to protect against Allied attacks from North Africa under Operation Torch.

One prominent example was on the Alpine plateau of Vercors, where 4,000 French freedom fighters fought against 10,000

**“DE GAULLE’S CONTACT WITH FRANCE WAS LIMITED, AND IN REALITY HE KNEW VERY LITTLE ABOUT THE ACTUAL RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS GOING ON IN THE COUNTRY”**

*Women accused of collaboration with Nazis are paraded through the streets of Paris barefoot, shaved, and with swastika burn marks on their faces in 1944*





Wehrmacht troops who were forced to call in an air assault to claim victory.

Elsewhere in the country, disruption efforts were becoming increasingly effective. Between January and June 1943, there were 130 acts of sabotage against rail lines every month, and by as early as September of that year, it had increased to a level of 530 per month.

Civilian cars were attached to the German troop transports to ward off bombing attempts, but the French were one step ahead and instead put timers on the explosives so they would only take out their target and not harm civilians. The Germans were struggling to transport equipment, and with the Allies about to break down the door of Fortress Europe, this help was essential to breaking the Wehrmacht.

Prior to Operation Overlord, 93 teams of three agents (one American, one British and one French) were sent to France to co-ordinate the game-changing invasion. France was now in a state of virtual civil war and the communists went one step further by kidnapping and executing Waffen SS member Major Helmut Kämpfe in June 1944. This demonstrated how influential the group had become but ended in disastrous consequences. The incensed Nazis led by Major Otto Dickmann punished these 'terrorists' by torching the village of Oradour-sur-Glane. A small commune in central France, it was destroyed on 10 June 1944 and 600 men, women and children were executed. The remains of the village remain untouched to this day.

When D-Day came, the Résistance was more than ready to help. Some groups helped isolate the 2nd SS Panzer Division in Brittany, preventing reinforcements from amassing on the beaches of Normandy. This is often down-played in contemporary literature, but was integral to the resounding success of the operation, with 3,000 written reports and 700 wireless reports being sent to Allied command in the run up to the operation. Schemes such as Plan Vert, where the Cheminots paralysed the French rail network by destroying 1,800 railway engines, and attacks on garrisons at Tulle and Gueret hastened the Wehrmacht's demise.

Post D-Day, the German forces were reeling, but the work of the Résistance was far from complete. The locals, who now wore armbands with the cross of Lorraine to show their allegiance, helped the Allies push forward and assisted in Operation Dragoon on the country's south coast. They sent small parties to Marseilles, Toulon and Sete to preserve port installations that the Germans were targeting for destruction in a scorched-earth retreat.

General Eisenhower even remarked that the presence of the Résistance was worth 15 divisions in the field. With the Allies and Axis going head to head on the front line, the Résistance was free to liberate the remainder of their country and they were now regarded as legal combatants.

With the countryside virtually conquered (small sections of the Wehrmacht continued to fight hard, in the Colmar Pocket, for instance) the liberation of Paris could start. The Maquis were now under the umbrella of the de Gaulle-initiated Forces Françaises de l'interieur (FFI) and remained active when Allied troops were ashore, benefiting from weapons and millions of French Francs being parachuted into rural areas.

## OTHER EUROPEAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS

THE FRENCH RÉSISTANCE IS PERHAPS THE MOST FAMOUS, BUT OTHER AREAS OF EUROPE ALSO TOOK UP ARMS AGAINST THE NAZIS

### POLISH UNDERGROUND STATE

Poland was one of the most harshly treated nations of the whole war. The Polish capital, Warsaw, was the centre of operations and had the largest resistance system in Europe led by brave patriots. There was an underground parliament and a home army who constantly struggled with both Nazi and Soviet overlords.

*Right: Polish resistance culminated in the courageous Warsaw uprising that resulted in a fierce German backlash*



### NORWEGIAN RESISTANCE

With vast swathes of uninhabited rural land and a border with neutral Sweden, Norway was an ideal country for resistance movements. The Norwegian Secret Army, the Milorg, was integral in helping aid the British commando operations in the country and helped bring down the Quislings, who collaborated with the Nazis.

*Left: Norwegian resisters march away from Akershus fortress after retaking it from the Germans on 22 May 1945*



### BELGIAN RESISTANCE

France's neighbour also had its own resistance movement. Based primarily in the Ardennes, the Allies utilised their regular reports to help improve the accuracy of their European bombing campaigns. As well as intelligence, there were also armed units in Belgium including the Legion Belge, 'Armée Secrète' and Groupe G, who all helped create a solid network of civil resistance.

*Right: A Belgian nurse treats a wounded British soldier as they fight their way through Europe*



### RESISTENZA ITALIAN

Mussolini and his Blackshirts were never universally popular on the Italian peninsula. Resistance was mainly subdued under the Fascist dictatorship but escalated after the Allied landings in Sicily and the establishment of the Italian Social Republic. Italian partisans helped the Allies push the Germans back to the Alps and eventually got their prize, the capture of Il Duce.

*Left: The Resistenza took their anger out on Mussolini and the body of Il Duce was strung up in front of crowds in Milan*



### HOME GUARD

After the fall of France, the threat of a German invasion on British shores was very real. In response, an army of civilian volunteers known as the 'Auxiliary Units' was assembled to carry out sabotage and guerilla attacks in the wake of a potential German invasion. Luckily, it never came to this.

*Right: Auxiliary units formed part of the Home Guard and were trained in the face of a potential invasion*



The weapons would be stowed in barns and houses as the Résistance, who now numbered about 100,000 members, did their bit to prevent the Germans from maintaining any sort of reconnaissance network in the country.

### Total liberation

The liberation of Paris on 25 August is remembered for the scenes of jubilation across the capital, and seemingly the work of the French Résistance was done. De Gaulle, imposing himself as liberator-in-chief, officially disbanded all the groups and urged them to join the new French Army, and many did so, signing up to hit back at the Germans as the Third Reich's borders continued to shrink.

Revelations since the war's end have stated that the liberation of Paris could have happened much sooner if it weren't for political interference. The capital city had a high communist population at the time and both Eisenhower and de Gaulle were concerned that a successful liberation by the communists could end in the left taking control of the city. As a result, very few ammunition drops were allowed within the city limits and it was decreed that Paris would be taken only on the Allied forces' mark.

De Gaulle was intent on becoming the head of a new provisional government, and events

such as this sped up his ascension to power as he played the line of not being an active resister nor a collaborator perfectly. His myth of all of France always being united as one helped boost his political appeal. By March 1944, the CNR had already prepared for the end of the war and had social and economic reforms ready to implement. The Fourth Republic was taking shape and would extinguish the tortured memory of the Third.

The Gaullist memory is of Petain being the shield and de Gaulle being the sword that vanquished the Nazi threat. This outlook helped France move on in the tough post-war years and prevented vigilantes from targeting collaborators who had been scapegoated for deserting their country. Only by the 1970s, after the periods of civil unrest in the summer of 1968, when national identity and a social cohesion had stabilised, did the ideology begin to change and the efforts of the real Résistance came to the fore.

As France struggled to come to terms with this so-called 'Vichy Syndrome', the memory of the Résistance became mixed. While some saw their actions as a beacon of hope, they were also seen by others, in the first few years after the war, as terrorists who did as much harm as they did good. Conversely, the idea of any sort of Nazi collaboration is an ongoing sore subject.

A key difference to distinguish is opposition to the Germans and opposition to the Vichy regime. The French citizens who believed in Vichy France didn't necessarily approve of German occupation. The government was a means to an end and it was only in the later years of the war when Nazified laws came into existence and the Nazi atrocities began to worsen that many rallied to action.

Perhaps the most effective way of describing the real Résistance is to remove the idea of it being only one group of resisters and the notion of being either a resister or collaborator, with no in-between. The real Résistance is a combination of things. It began with the passion and dedication of small groups to stand up and fight for their future but only snowballed into the force we remember it being with substantial help from the Allies.

France was not liberated by itself, it was given its freedom by an international coalition and does owe a degree of gratitude to de Gaulle and in particular Moulin for being the driving forces that united each faction. There will always be controversy over the identity of the real Résistance and even if the true fighters were those who rose up prior to June 1944, it will be remembered forever for its crucial contribution to the freedom of France, Gaullist or otherwise.

Images: Alamy; Rex Features

**"THE REAL RÉSISTANCE IS A COMBINATION OF THINGS. IT BEGAN WITH THE PASSION AND DEDICATION OF SMALL GROUPS TO STAND UP AND FIGHT FOR THEIR FUTURE BUT ONLY SNOWBALLED INTO THE FORCE WE REMEMBER IT BEING WITH SUBSTANTIAL HELP FROM THE ALLIES"**

*The liberation of Paris could have been achieved even earlier if it wasn't for political differences between the Allied commanders and the communist arm of the Resistance*



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# DEFENCE OF PAVLOV'S HOUSE

An under-strength platoon of Soviet soldiers defends Stalingrad's house of horrors against overwhelming Wehrmacht numbers

**T**he Battle of Stalingrad is one of the most brutal battles in history and, for most historians, it is the crucial turning point of World War II. The Nazi attempt to take the strategic city of Stalingrad on the Volga River turned into an apocalyptic bloodbath. It resulted in huge casualties and led to the eventual retreat and defeat of the Axis armies in Russia. There were countless acts of heroism in the battle but one of the most famous is the dogged, two-month-long Russian resistance at a place called, 'Pavlov's House', a fortified apartment block in the centre of the city.

**"THE NAZI ATTEMPT TO TAKE THE STRATEGIC CITY OF STALINGRAD ON THE VOLGA RIVER TURNED INTO AN APOCALYPTIC BLOODBATH"**

## 1. THE GERMANS ATTACK AN APARTMENT BUILDING

On 23 September 1942, German soldiers attack a four-storey apartment block in the centre of Stalingrad. The building is parallel to the west bank of the Volga River and overlooks '9th January Square', a large public square that is named after the Bloody Sunday Massacre of 1905.

## 2. SERGEANT PAVLOV SEIZES THE BUILDING

When the apartment block is attacked, a platoon of Soviet soldiers from the 13th Guards Rifle Division is ordered to take and defend it. They are led by Sergeant Yakov Pavlov, a low-ranking NCO who is serving as the acting platoon commander as the unit's lieutenant and senior sergeants have all been killed and wounded. The assault on the building is successful, although only four men out of a 30-man platoon survive the assault.

## 3. PAVLOV STRIKES STRATEGIC GOLD

Pavlov surveys the situation and finds the house is strategically well placed for defence. It is positioned on a cross street and gives the defenders a clear line of sight for one kilometre to the north, south and west of the city. After two days he is reinforced and resupplied, bringing his unit up to under-strength number of 25 men.

## 4. DIGGING IN

Joseph Stalin issues Order Number 227 to the troops in Stalingrad, "Not one step back." Pavlov takes this to heart and orders the building to be surrounded with four layers of barbed wire and minefields. He also sets up machine gun posts in every available window facing the square as well as anti-tank rifles and mortars.

## 5. TANK DESTRUCTION FROM THE ROOF

Pavlov discovers that a PTRS-41 anti-tank rifle is very effective against German tanks when it is mounted on the roof. When tanks approach within 25 metres of the building, their thin turret armour becomes exposed to anti-tank fire from above but they are unable to elevate their weapons high enough to retaliate. Pavlov reportedly destroys almost a dozen tanks using this tactic.

## 6. INTERNAL LOGISTICS AND SUPPORT

In order to communicate properly, Pavlov's men breach the walls in the basement and upper floors of the building and also dig a communications trench to Soviet positions outside. Supplies are brought in via then trench or by boats crossing the Volga, despite German air raids and shelling.

## 7. A HARSH EXISTENCE

Despite the creation of the communications trench, the soldiers (and civilians who live in the basement) constantly suffer from a shortage of food and especially water. There are no beds and the soldiers try to sleep on insulation wool torn off pipes.

## 8. A RELENTLESS BOMBARDMENT

The Germans continually shoot at the building day and night but each time soldiers or tanks cross the square to close in Pavlov's men inflict a hail of machine gun and anti-tank fire from the basement, windows and roof top, inflicting large casualties and forcing the Germans to retreat.

## 9. A GRIM TACTIC?

By mid-November Pavlov's men reputedly use the lulls in fighting to run out and kick over-heaped piles of German corpses so that they are not used as cover for the next round of attackers. Whatever the truth, the defenders hold out until they are relieved by Soviet counterattacks on 25 November 1942.

## THE CASUALTIES OF STALINGRAD

**THE SOVIET VICTORY IN THE CAUCASUS TURNED THE TIDE OF WWII BUT AT A HORRENDOUS PRICE FOR BOTH SIDES**

The Battle of Stalingrad ended at the end of January and early February 1943, almost exactly ten years to the day that Adolf Hitler had come to power in Germany in 1933. He had envisaged a Third Reich that would last for a thousand years but after Stalingrad that dream sharply evaporated. The reason for this was the massive casualties incurred by the Germans during the battle. The Wehrmacht's Sixth Army had originally been comprised of 285,000 soldiers. Of these men 165,000 had been killed and 29,000 had been wounded and evacuated. That left 91,000 men who were taken prisoner by the Russians despite Hitler's refusal to allow the men to surrender. Most of these prisoners would not survive Soviet captivity. It is estimated that only 5,000 German troops escaped the carnage.

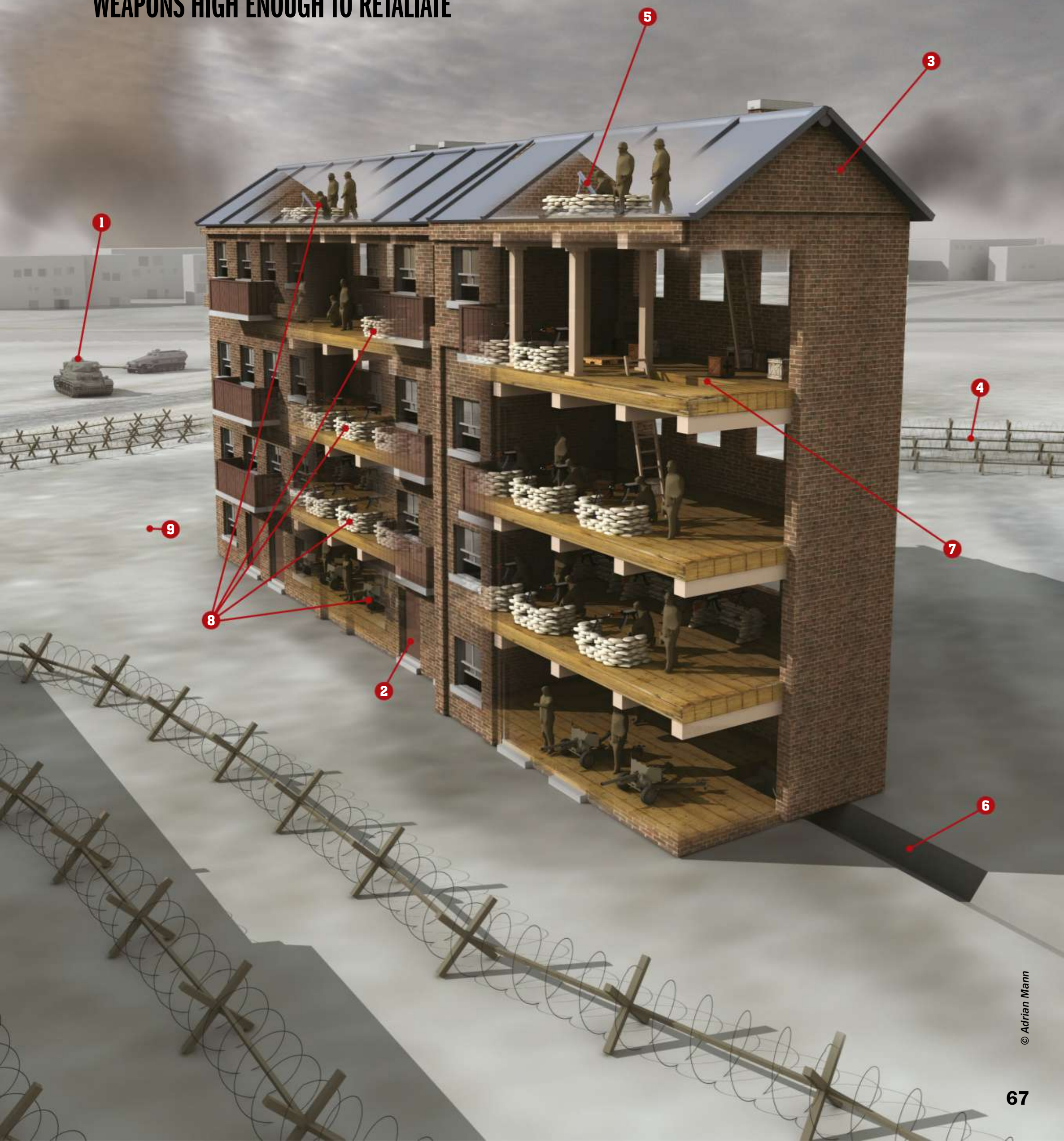
The Russian casualties were even worse, with possibly one million fatalities, including nearly all the men that Stalin had committed to early stage of the battle. However, the Soviet Union could replace these enormous losses, whereas the Germans could not. The loss of a complete army group and its equipment meant that the Germans could neither sustain their advance into Russia nor cope with the eventual Russian counterattack. Hitler was furious, and angrily recognised that, "The God of War has gone over to the other side."



A German soldier is marched into captivity. 91,000 Wehrmacht soldiers were taken prisoners by the Red Army at Stalingrad



“WHEN TANKS APPROACH WITHIN 25 METRES OF THE BUILDING, THEIR THIN TURRET ARMOUR BECOMES EXPOSED TO ANTI-TANK FIRE FROM ABOVE BUT THEY ARE UNABLE TO ELEVATE THEIR WEAPONS HIGH ENOUGH TO RETALIATE”







# CHURCHILL'S CUT-THROATS

While its sister unit wreaked havoc in North Africa, the fledgling Special Boat Squadron worked to break the Axis grip on the Aegean

WORDS GAVIN MORTIMER

**I**n the early summer of 1944, Simon Wingfield-Digby, the Conservative member of parliament for West Dorset, posed a question in the House of Commons to Winston Churchill. "Is it true, Mr Prime Minister," he enquired, "that there is a body of men out in the Aegean Islands, fighting under the Union flag, that are nothing short of being a band of murderous, renegade cut-throats?"

Churchill did not appreciate the question. "If you do not take your seat and keep quiet," he snapped, "I will send you out to join them." Churchill's tart response would have come as no surprise. He was, after all, indirectly responsible for the 'cut-throats' that Wingfield-Digby spoke of. In reality, they were the Special Boat Squadron, an elite unit whose origins stretched back to the early summer of 1940 when Churchill had called for Britain to raise its own commando unit, or 'storm troops', to hit back at the Germans. One of the first to answer the call was Roger Courtney, a prewar adventurer and explorer who had once canoed down the White Nile.

Courtney suggested forming a small unit of seaborne raiders who would approach enemy targets using 'folboats', folding canoes made of

wood and canvas that had been popularised in the 1930s for those of an adventurous bent.

After proving the effectiveness of his idea with a successful mock attack on a Royal Naval ship, Courtney was granted permission to launch a Folboat Troop in July 1940, and just six months later, the unit was posted to North Africa. On 21 June 1941, the section achieved their first successful operation when two commandos landed by canoe on the west coast of Italy and blew a train off a coastal railway line.

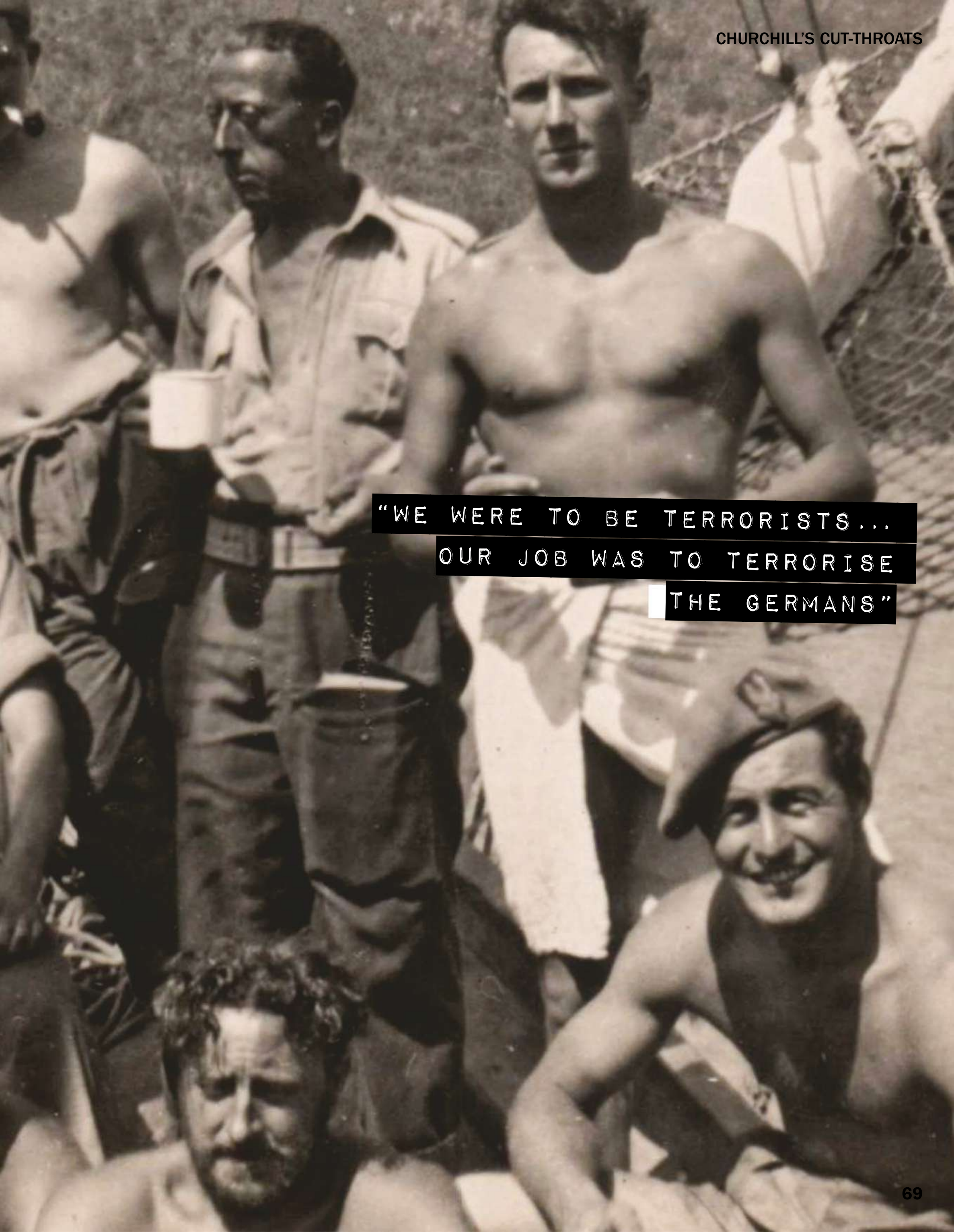
It was a triumph for the unit, whose name was soon changed to the Special Boat Section, but Courtney wasn't able to savour his success for long; he was invalided to England in poor health. The section might have withered and died had its activities not come to the attention of Captain David Stirling. The young Guards Officer had only recently formed his own special force – the Special Air Service (SAS) – but their inaugural parachute operation had ended in failure (in November 1941) and Stirling was on the lookout for innovative new ways to attack the enemy.

He incorporated the Special Boat Section into the SAS, and throughout the summer of

*Hank Hancock, right in the back row, was a talented photographer and artist, who recorded the SBS's exploits on film and in sketches*







"WE WERE TO BE TERRORISTS...  
OUR JOB WAS TO TERRORISE  
THE GERMANS"



1942, they reconnoitred Syrian and Lebanese beaches, raided Cretan airfields and, on one audacious attack on Rhodes in September, destroyed a dozen enemy aircraft.

In the same month as the Rhodes operation, Stirling was authorised to expand the SAS into a regiment. He raised four squadrons – A, B, C and D, with the latter a specialist amphibious unit – but Stirling never got the chance to oversee this expansion. He was captured in January 1943 and the SAS was plunged into what one officer called “chaos”.

Middle East Headquarters in Cairo decided to carve up the SAS, sending the French soldiers of C Squadron to Britain for further training, and despatching A and B squadrons to Palestine to begin preparing for the invasion of Sicily. As for D Squadron, that was renamed the Special Boat Squadron (SBS) and placed under the command of George Jellicoe.

By the end of April 1943, the SBS had a strength of 13 officers and 118 other ranks. Many of the men were ex-Guardsmen, including Dick Holmes, a Londoner, and his great pal, Doug Wright, a farm labourer before the war who, like Holmes, stood well over six foot tall. Among the officers was Captain David Sutherland, who had gone from Eton into the Black Watch, and a 22-year-old Danish lieutenant called Anders Lassen. Tall, blond and handsome, Lassen already had a Military Cross to his name and a reputation for quick, cold efficiency. Holmes was impressed by Lassen’s

“YOU WERE TAKEN A MILE OUT TO SEA IN A MOTOR DORY AND THEN YOU JUMPED INTO THE WATER IN FULL KIT AND SWAM BACK TO SHORE”

“ability to transform himself into a killing machine, to perform the task with a panache that earned him the reputation of a killer of Germans par excellence.”

One of the handful of signallers in the SBS was John Waterman. He recalls that April and May were spent preparing for operations, undertaking arduous route marches and PT drills, but also more specialised tuition. “We trained in all sorts of weapons, including captured weapons,” he said. “We also were taught how to use plastic explosives and then we did our sea training. You were taken a mile out to sea in a motor dory and then you jumped into water in full kit and swam back to shore.”

The inaugural SBS operation ended in failure when a raid on Sardinia in early July failed due to a combination of sickness – the SBS base in Algiers was rife with Malaria – and treachery. The unit’s Italian-American guide turned out to have more allegiance to Italy than America, and once on Sardinia he alerted the Italian forces to the presence of the British.

In the same week that the Sardinia operation went awry, David Sutherland and 12 men

landed on Crete. Establishing his headquarters close to the landing beach, Sutherland sent B Patrol, under the command of Ken Lamonby and consisting of Lance Corporal Dick Holmes and two other men, to attack an airfield near the island’s capital city of Heraklion. Meanwhile, C Patrol, led by Lassen, was to hit the airfield at Kastelli.

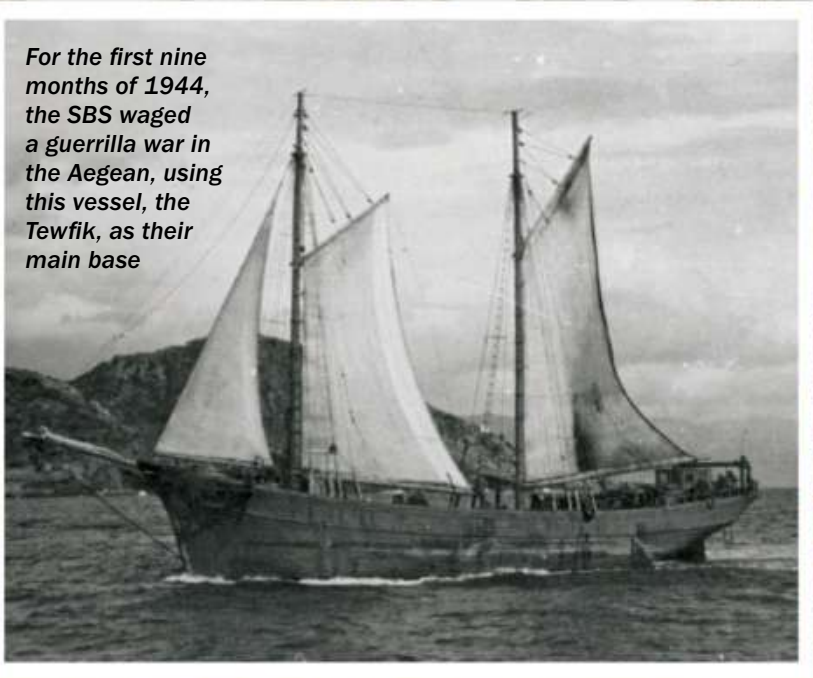
For most of the men on the raid, this was their first experience of guerrilla warfare, and Holmes recalled his “heart pounding like shit” as they headed inland from the beach, each man carrying about 80 pounds over rough and rocky terrain. “Our rucksacks were these big Italian packs,” recalled Holmes. “They had no framework and so we put a groundsheet between our clothes and the pack otherwise they chafed the skin.”

The unit’s D-Day came on 4 July, and Lassen’s patrol infiltrated their target undetected. Cretan resistance fighters had informed the SBS officer that there were eight Stuka dive-bombers on the eastern side of Kastelli airfield, and five Junkers 88 bombers and a couple of fighters on the western side.

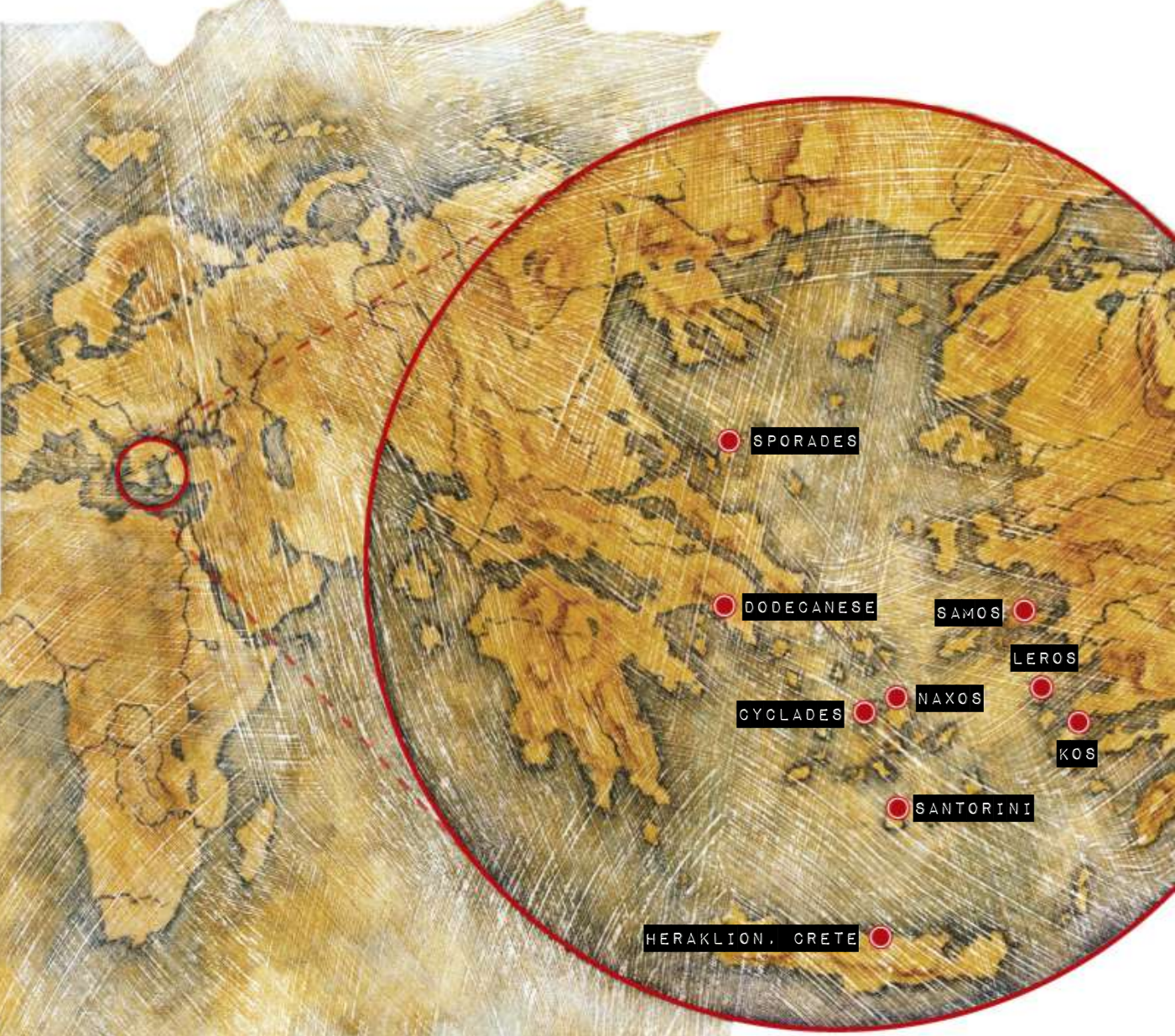


# THE HUNTING GROUND OF THE SBS

ALTHOUGH CAPTURING THE AEGEAN ISLANDS SEEMED AN UNIMPORTANT FOLLY TO MOST, CHURCHILL WAS CONVINCED THAT TAKING CONTROL OF THEM WOULD UNDERMINE HITLER AND THE AXIS FORCES IN THE REGION



For the first nine months of 1944, the SBS waged a guerrilla war in the Aegean, using this vessel, the Tewfik, as their main base







# ANDY LASSEN'S VICTORIA CROSS

**THE ONLY MEMBER OF BRITAIN'S SPECIAL FORCES TO BE AWARDED THE VC WAS A DANISH OFFICER, WHO RECEIVED THE HONOUR POSTHUMOUSLY**

On the night of 8/9 April 1945, Anders Lassen led a ten-strong SBS patrol to attack a series of German machine-gun emplacements on the eastern shore of Lake Comacchio.

The lake, a natural obstacle to the progress of the Allied advance north through Italy, was well defended by the Germans on the north shore, and the SBS task was to eliminate the smaller force on the east, while also causing a diversion to the main assault.

Two local fishermen guided the SBS across the lake in wooden fishing boats, and once ashore, the Dane led his men along a road that ran parallel to the water. They soon encountered the first machine-gun nest, and although that was successfully subdued, more enemy fire was poured down the road.

Two SBS men were killed, another wounded, and the attack was in danger of faltering. Seizing the initiative, Lassen charged forward, zigzagging up the road, throwing grenades and firing bursts from his Tommy gun. One, two, three German positions were destroyed, but then Lassen was mortally wounded.

His parents were presented their son's Victoria Cross by King George VI in December 1945, the citation praising their son's "high sense of devotion to duty and... magnificent courage."

*Below: After being wounded, Lassen refused to be evacuated as he said it would endanger further lives*



"LASSEN CHARGED FORWARD, ZIGZAGGING UP THE ROAD, THROWING GRENADES AND FIRING BURSTS FROM HIS TOMMY GUN"

The four raiders carried Lewes bombs (named after Jock Lewes, an SAS officer killed in December 1941), which were stodgy lumps weighing just a pound and consisting of plastic explosive and thermite rolled in motor car oil. Lassen and his men were busy planting bombs on the Junkers when they were challenged by an Italian sentry. Shots were fired and in seconds the airfield was swarming with guards. But it was dark, the Italians were nervous, and when Lassen threw a couple of grenades, pandemonium ensued. The SBS dispersed their remaining bombs on a variety of targets before withdrawing unscathed. At the same time but approximately 15 miles north, Dick Holmes was approaching his target through some olive trees. It was no longer an airfield, which had been found to be inactive, but a large petrol dump encircled by an earthen wall.

The other three men of B Patrol were dealing with an adjacent bomb dump, leaving Holmes to creep along the dozens of drums of valuable fuel, placing charges at regular intervals. Suddenly he saw no more than 30 yards away a German guard and his dog. "The sentry was about to continue his patrol," wrote Holmes in his report, "when a second guard with a dog came past the dump and the pair began a lengthy conversation." The presence of the guards caused the other SBS raiders to abort their attack on the bomb dump.

Praying that none of the two-hour fuses would go off prematurely, Holmes hid among

the barrels of oil as the two Germans gossiped, occasionally telling their dogs to stop whining. "To my apprehensive ears the dogs seemed very restless, as if they knew I was hiding just a short distance away," recalled Holmes. "But neither guard picked up on their dogs' agitation, and after half an hour the Germans moved away from the dump."

At 1.10am, Holmes's bombs exploded, causing him to perform "a little dance on the Cretan hillside." The next morning, a local informed the raiders that flaming streams of petrol had cascaded through the earthen walls and engulfed the adjacent bomb dump, blowing it sky high.

Days after the attack, the *Egyptian Mail* newspaper boasted of a "'Smash and Grab' Land Raid on a Crete Airfield." The SBS had even escaped from the island with a couple of prisoners from a German patrol they'd encountered on their way back to the beach. Back in Cairo, the British treated their prisoners to dinner at Groppi's, one of the city's most celebrated restaurants. Holmes (awarded a Military Medal for his part in the raid) recalled that after three weeks on Crete, the SBS were bearded, dirty and unkempt, but the stares they received as they strode into Groppi's "were nothing compared to the stares accorded the two Germans."

The collapse of Benito Mussolini's dictatorship in Italy had significant ramifications for the SBS and the islands of the Aegean,

*When they weren't raiding islands, the men of the SBS had time to relax and enjoy their surroundings*



*Above: The SBS operated from a remote base in the Gulf of Kos in Turkish waters, in flagrant breach of the country's neutrality*



*Regular resupplies were delivered to the SBS from Palestine, but they also pillaged the German garrisons they raided*



hitherto an unimportant backwater in the European Theatre. The islands – to the north the Sporades, the Cyclades in the west and the Dodecanese in the east – now became of strategic importance. Most had been garrisoned by Italians, and following the Armistice in September 1943, the British moved to take over the islands, some of which contained airstrips from where they could attack the Balkan Peninsula.

Hitler, for his part, had no intention of letting the British move in. "Abandonment of the islands would create the most unfavourable impression [among our allies]," declared the Führer. "To avoid such a blow to our prestige, we may even have to accept the loss of our troops and materiel."

For the next year, Germany and Britain fought a bloody war for the possession of the sun-drenched islands that had been enticing pleasure-seekers for more than 2,000 years. Now Kos, Leros, Samos, Naxos, Santorini and Symi all became the scene of some brutal engagements. "We were to be terrorists... Our job was to terrorise the Germans," recalled Dick Holmes. British forces, the SBS among them, had been forced to withdraw from the Aegean in the autumn of 1943, when the Germans launched a major assault to retake the islands. In early 1944, Jellicoe was instructed to hit back, fighting the guerrilla war for which his men been trained. First, the SBS were to focus their attacks on shipping and harbour installations so as to reduce the enemy's

capability to move quickly from island to island; then they were to launch hit-and-run raids on the islands themselves, first in the Dodecanese and then moving further afield to the western Cyclades and the Sporades in the north. As one of their officers commented, they were to act as "legitimised pirates."

The SBS headed north west to a remote bay on the west coast of Turkey aboard several motor launches and a 180-ton schooner, Tewfik, which John Waterman recalled had a reputation of being temperamental. "They would have a hell of a job getting it going sometimes," he said. "So Lassen would use an explosive charge. He would open a sort of hatch, take some explosive, prime it and drop it in and then screw the thing back up, and it would get the engine going."

Once anchored in the isolated bay, with the Turks turning a blind eye to the flagrant violation of their official neutrality, the SBS began to

"ONCE ANCHORED IN THE ISOLATED BAY, WITH THE TURKS TURNING A BLIND EYE TO THE FLAGRANT VIOLATION OF THEIR OFFICIAL NEUTRALITY, THE SBS BEGAN TO TERRORISE"

*It was Churchill's vision to take control of the Greek islands with a small party of highly trained men*





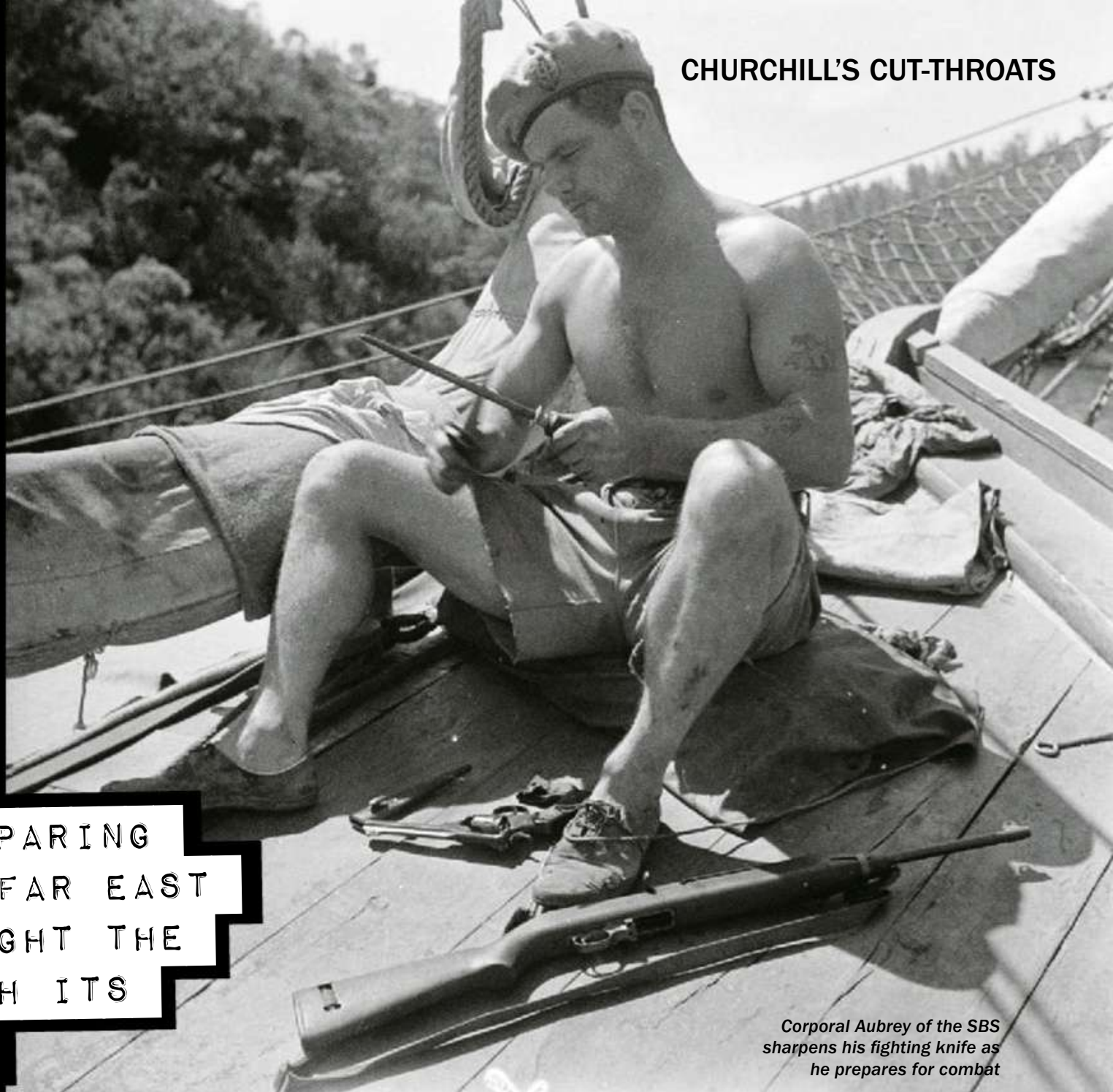


# DISBANDED

**THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT DISBANDED THE SBS IN 1945 BECAUSE IT ENVISAGED A WORLD OF PEACE WITHOUT THE NEED FOR SPECIAL FORCES**

The Aegean had been the ideal theatre for the SBS, allowing them to wage a guerrilla war in which courage went hand in hand with initiative and daring. The operations that followed were less successful, although they had the honour of being the first British soldiers to liberate the Greek city of Salonika in October 1944. In Greece and Yugoslavia, they became increasingly caught up in the incipient civil wars, and by the spring of 1945, opportunities to engage the enemy were restricted to small raids against Adriatic islands off the Croatian coast. The SBS were preparing to deploy to the Far East when the USA brought the war to an end with its two atomic bombs, and in October 1945, the SBS was officially disbanded.

"THE SBS WERE PREPARING TO DEPLOY TO THE FAR EAST WHEN THE USA BROUGHT THE WAR TO AN END WITH ITS TWO ATOMIC BOMBS"



*Corporal Aubrey of the SBS sharpens his fighting knife as he prepares for combat*



terrorise. One patrol landed on Symi and killed ten Germans; another wrecked the cable stations on Lisso and Archi; one raiding party intercepted three enemy vessels and sent them and their crews to the bottom of the Aegean.

In the early hours of 23 April 1944, Lassen and 18 men came ashore on Santorini and made for the main German garrison. One of the raiders recalled that "Lassen's motto on prisoners that night seemed to be 'don't take any'." They entered the garrison unseen, and once inside, the killing began.

The SBS moved methodically through the building in pairs, one man throwing in a grenade, the next raking the room with machine-gun fire from the side of the door. "That was the only time I was in action side by side with Lassen and it's one of the reasons I'm trying to forget the war," recalled Sergeant Jack Nicholson years later. "It's no fun throwing grenades into rooms and shooting sleeping men. That garrison could have been captured."

While Lassen was wiping out the garrison on Santorini, Lieutenant Kingsley Clarke was sent on a tour of the islands with instructions from David Sutherland to spread alarm and despondency at every opportunity. With him went some of the most experienced men in the squadron, including Dick Holmes, Doug Wright and Duggie Pomford.

First they hit Kos, destroying the island's telegraph station and killing a number of Germans. They then set sail for Amorgos, 15 miles east, having learned that approximately 30 Germans had recently left the island for Santorini – they were despatched to help hunt

for Lassen and his men, who had already escaped. "We were armed to the teeth, bearded and a pretty frightening sight," recalled Holmes. There were ten Germans still on the island and the SBS were told by locals that they were billeted in the village school.

The SBS launched the attack on the school with a single grenade. Then Doug Wright opened up with his Bren from a roof overlooking the building. "I fired ten Bren gun magazines loaded with a good mixture of ball, tracer and incendiary and armour piercing," he remembered, "raking all the windows and doors of the building."

Immediately Wright ceased firing, Pomford dashed forward, throwing a grenade through a window and then firing a quick burst from his Tommy gun. Clarke called on the Germans to surrender. Instead they chose to burst out of the building, guns blazing as if they were Wild West bandits fleeing a botched bank raid. Two of the ten escaped in the darkness; the rest were killed. "It wasn't possible to take many prisoners," reflected Wright, who was awarded the Military Medal for his part in the attack.

Attacking the islands was the easy part for the SBS. It was the voyage back to their hideout in Turkey that was fraught with danger. Returning from Amorgos, the engine blew on their wooden fishing boat, so they reverted to sail. "On a couple of occasions German aircraft came in low to investigate us," recalled Holmes. "Fortunately some of the boys had taken to wearing the German peaked caps and we carried a lot of German weapons so that fooled the pilots. It was pretty nerve wracking."



An SBS patrol completes its tour of the Acropolis during their posting to Athens in the late autumn of 1944



At the end of May, S Squadron received orders to return to Palestine. Sutherland, who, not wishing to miss out on the action, had led a raid against the island of Lesbos, totted up the squadron's scorecard in the previous two months: three caiques (local wooden fishing boats used by both sides) captured and 12 sunk or damaged; three wireless stations destroyed and 11 more captured; three cable stations destroyed and dozens of enemy soldiers killed or captured. In addition, 25 tons of much needed food had been distributed to the malnourished inhabitants of the islands. "I reflected as we sailed quietly south back to Beirut how special these officers and men were," recalled Sutherland. "The

operations were well planned and carried out in a highly professional way at all levels."

Donald Grant, an American war correspondent who had accompanied the SBS on one raid to see first hand their skill in guerrilla warfare, subsequently recounted the experience in a radio broadcast on 22 May 1944. Having described a typical raid, he concluded: "There is considerable variation in uniform, but all are dirty, greasy and torn. About the only common garment to all Raiding Force men is a strangely hooded jacket, which makes them appear to be a band of Robin Hood's merry men, stepped out of a story book, complete with knives slung at their belts."

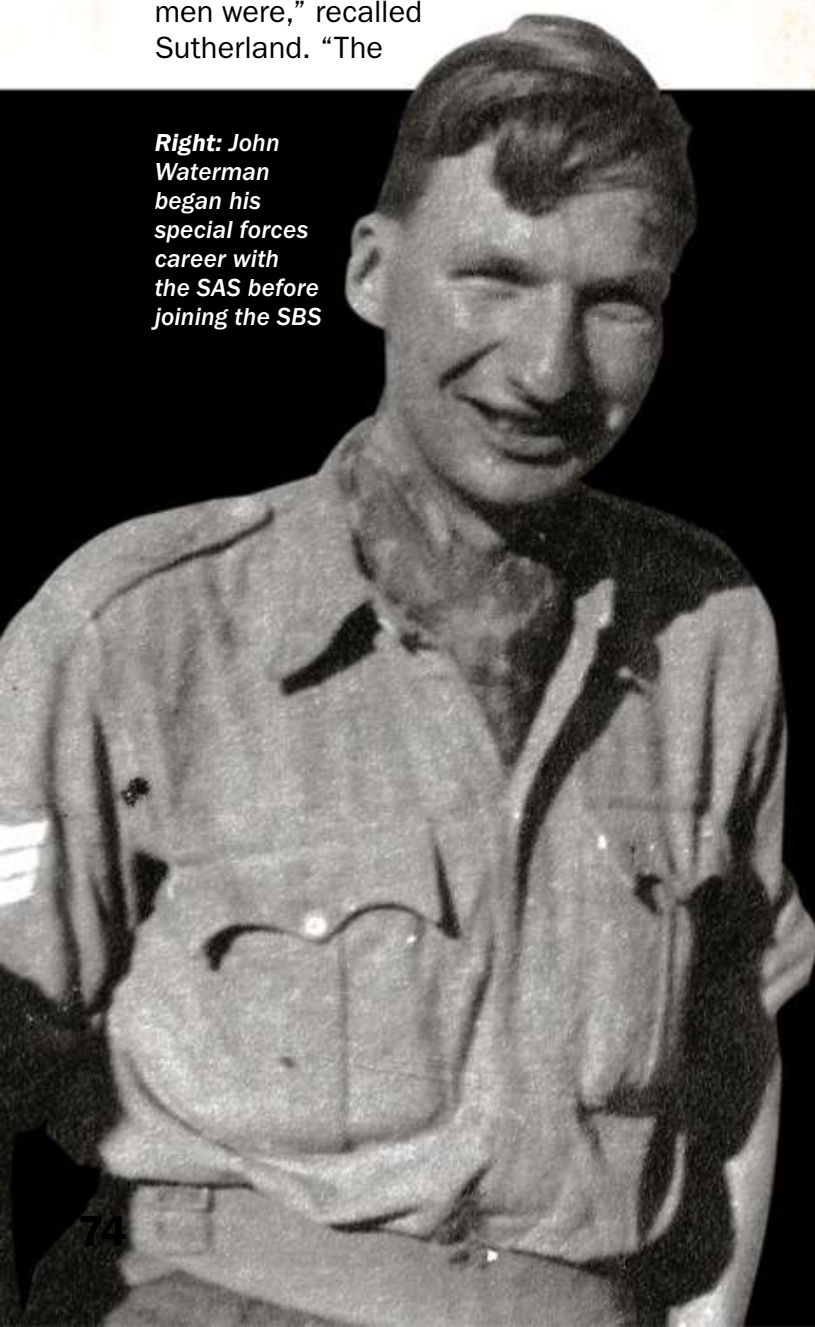
Such melodramatic broadcasts alarmed not only the Germans but also one or two Britons

— like Simon Wingfield-Digby, the Conservative MP who simply couldn't comprehend what was required to defeat a military machine as savage as the Nazis. Churchill, fortunately, wasn't so naive, and it was thanks to his 'cut-throats' that in May 1944, the Germans drafted in another 4,000 troops to garrison the Aegean Islands at a time when their resources were already desperately thin.

"We didn't do anything that affected the war in any great way," reflected Dick Holmes. "But I think we slowed them down in the Aegean and we also tied up quite a few thousand of their troops when they would have been better deployed in Russia or France, and we were doing that with only a few dozen men of our own. So we felt we were doing something necessary."

Images: Getty; Textures.com; Thinkstock

Right: John Waterman began his special forces career with the SAS before joining the SBS



## JOHN WATERMAN

**AN SBS SIGNALLER FROM 1943-45, WATERMAN IS ONE OF THE LAST REMAINING VETERANS OF THE ELITE UNIT**

A Kentish man, Waterman joined the SAS in 1942 and transferred to the SBS shortly after, serving with them until their disbandment in October 1945. He saw action in the Aegean campaign, the Balkans and Italy, and a few years after the war he emigrated to Canada where he still lives.

"I joined the Special Boat Squadron when it was formed in 1943 as one of the unit's four signallers and I worked closely with Major George Jellicoe, our CO. In early 1944, the SBS assembled a small force working in the Aegean islands from a base on a remote stretch of Turkish coastline. The Germans had kicked us out of the likes of Leros and Samos the previous autumn so our role was to cause as much trouble as possible on the Dodecanese islands. Our base was a large wooden schooner, and from there we sailed into the Aegean in small wooden fishing boats to attack the islands. A lot of the time I was on the schooner, maintaining radio communication with Jellicoe in Palestine, but I went on one raid to Nisyros. The sole Italian on

the island was on the side of the Germans, but the moment he saw us landing, he took to the hills.

"Not all the islands were garrisoned by Germans but on the ones that were, we would raid their billet and destroy any communications we found. By the summer of 1944, the Germans had reinforced the islands in the Aegean with thousands more troops, at a time they could ill afford to.

"From the Aegean we moved into Greece, in the van of the invasion force, and we liberated the port of Patras in the south of the country, before chasing the Germans as far as Lamia, before returning to Athens. In the spring of 1945, we started to raid the islands off the coast of Croatia, crushing the last German resistance.

"Reflecting on my years in the SBS, I did feel I was among exceptional soldiers. We had a confidence in our own ability and we were expected to display initiative and have an independence of thought that wasn't that common in the British Army of the time."



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**“THE KING NOT ONLY HONOURS  
NGARIMU HIMSELF, BUT  
THROUGH HIM, HIS BATTALION  
AND HIS COUNTRY. NO WORDS  
OF MINE CAN ADEQUATELY  
EXPRESS MY ADMIRATION FOR  
HIS COURAGE”**

**SIR CYRIL NEWALL, GOVERNOR GENERAL  
OF NEW ZEALAND**

*Moana-Nui-a-Kiwa Ngarimu  
was the first Maori to ever be  
awarded a Victoria Cross*





# MOANA-NUI-A-KIWA NGARIMU

## VICTORIA CROSS

This brave New Zealander became the first Maori to be awarded the VC during the North African campaign in 1943

**YEARS ACTIVE:** 1940-1943  
**CONFLICTS:** WORLD WAR II  
**RANK:** 2ND LIEUTENANT

**WORDS:** TOM GARNER

**A**lthough New Zealand is a small, isolated country in the south-western Pacific Ocean it played a large part during WWII. In 1940, the country's population was only around 1,600,000, but nonetheless around 140,000 New Zealanders served in the Allied armed forces. Among them were 16,000 Maoris, of whom 20 per cent served in the 28th (Maori) Battalion. Consisting of between 700-900 men, the battalion established a formidable reputation as one of New Zealand's finest fighting forces and perhaps their bravest soldier was Moana-Nui-a-Kiwa Ngarimu, the first Maori to be awarded the Victoria Cross.

Ngarimu was born on 7 April 1919 at Whareponga on the East Coast region of North Island and had both Ngati Porou and Te Whanau-a-Apanui iwi (tribal) descent. During his teenage years, he was known to be an outstanding rugby player and by 1939 he was training to be a sheep farmer and engaged to be married. However, when war broke out it was not entirely certain that he would be allowed to volunteer and fight.

Upon the declaration of war, Maori leaders offered men for both home defence and

overseas service before the New Zealand parliament. Although there was some questioning over whether Maoris would or should assist the British, a prominent Maori MP Sir Apirana Ngata declared, "We are participants in a great Commonwealth, to the defence of which we cannot hesitate to

**"AROUND 140,000 NEW ZEALANDERS SERVED. AMONG THEM WERE 16,000 MAORIS, OF WHOM 20 PER CENT SERVED IN THE 28TH (MAORI) BATTALION"**

contribute our blood and our lives. We are of one house, and if our Pakeha (white New Zealander) brothers fall, we fall with them. How can we ever hold up our heads, when the struggle is over, to the question, 'Where were you when New Zealand was at war?'"

The government agreed with Ngata and the 28th (Maori) battalion was formed in October

1939. Enlistment in the battalion was voluntary for Maoris while non-Maoris were subject to conscription by May 1940. Tens of thousands of Maoris registered for service in the New Zealand armed forces and mostly served in areas such as home defence, artillery, engineering and service corps. Nevertheless, a significant percentage of recruits served in the 28th Battalion and Ngarimu volunteered at Ruatoria on 11 May 1940.

The 28th Battalion was part of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2NZEF) during the war. The division consisted of 15,000-20,000 men that were divided into three infantry brigades (4th, 5th and 6th). Because the 28th was a specially formed battalion it was attached to each of the division's three brigades at different times. The battalion itself was divided into five companies, which included four rifle companies of 125 men.

Each company was organised on tribal lines and selected officers and NCOs trained at Trentham near Wellington from November 1939. The battalion then assembled as a whole at Palmerston North on 26 January 1940 before finally sailing from Wellington with the 2NZEF in early May aboard the luxury



liner RMS Aquitania. Despite being willingly accepted by the New Zealand government, the 28th Battalion were subject to the racial segregation policies of South Africa when the Aquitania stopped over in Cape Town. While the white New Zealanders were given shore leave, the Maoris were kept on the ship for four days. Frustration mounted and the battalion was eventually given less than an hour to see the city. Despite being warned to be on their best behaviour, the troops were warmly received by the local population.

Arriving in Scotland on 16 June 1940, the battalion spent the Battle of Britain in southern England training and preparing defences. It was during this period that Ngarimu was selected for intelligence duties.

After serving for six months in England, the battalion sailed for Egypt and upon arrival in March 1941 was reinforced by 300 Maori from New Zealand.

From late March 1941, Ngarimu and the 28th were sent to defend northern Greece against a German invasion but a blitzkrieg offensive in April completely outflanked Commonwealth and Greek forces. Ngarimu would have first seen action at Olympus Pass on 15 April and by the time the battalion was evacuated to Crete, dozens of men had been killed or taken prisoner.

The subsequent battle for Crete saw the battalion come into its own. Although the Germans eventually took the island, the Maoris distinguished themselves on a dirt road known as '42nd Street'. When the Germans advanced, the battalion led the 5th Brigade in a ferocious bayonet charge and inflicted significant casualties. The Maoris claimed to have killed

**“ON 26 JUNE 1942, THE 21ST PANZER DIVISION SURROUNDED THE 2NZEF BUT THE MAORIS SMASHED THROUGH WITH A SURPRISE BAYONET ATTACK”**

more than 80 Germans for the loss of only four men. Although it cannot be known for certain, it is possible that Ngarimu remembered this offensive action for future operations.

Once they were evacuated to Egypt, Ngarimu took part in the North African campaign with the battalion. By April 1942 he had been commissioned as a second lieutenant and became the platoon commander of C Company. This was entirely appropriate because C Company comprised of Maoris from the tribes of the East Coast region such as the Ngati Porou and Rongowhakaata. Lieutenant Ngarimu and the battalion soon became heavily involved in the fighting of the Western Desert from the summer of 1942.

On 26 June 1942, the 21st Panzer Division surrounded the 2NZEF but they managed to break out with the Maoris smashing through German lines with a surprise bayonet attack at night. The battalion then took part in the decisive Allied victory at the Second Battle of El Alamein and the Maoris participated

*Members of the 28th (Maori) Battalion perform a haka (ceremonial war dance) for the king of Greece in Egypt, 24 June 1941. Like Ngarimu, these men were all survivors of the Battle of Greece*





in the subsequent pursuit of retreating Axis forces. On 23 January the battalion became the second New Zealand outfit to enter Tripoli. By now the Maoris, including Ngarimu, were highly experienced and effective soldiers. This success came at a price, however, when in February 1943 officers from C Company, including Ngarimu, wrote to Sir Apirana Ngata to describe the battalion's casualties. Following El Alamein and Tripoli, some men had been wounded two or three times with the fittest among them being used to reinforce the front lines. The officers suggested that their men should have some rest, however, Ngarimu and his comrades were about to earn a place in the history books.

After the fall of Tripoli the Eighth Army, of which the 28th Battalion was a part, looked to push into Tunisia, but its way was blocked by the Mareth Line: a defensive position that was 35 kilometres long and extended from the Mediterranean coast to inland mountains.

On 20 March 1943 the Eighth Army attacked the line with XXX Corps against the Italian-German 1st Army. At the same time Free French and New Zealand troops attacked the German right flank and when XXX Corps was thrown back the flanking attack was reinforced. It was at this point that 28th Battalion found itself in a low mountain pass in rocky country known as the Tebaga Gap. The battalion's objective was a hill known as Point 209, which was heavily defended by Wehrmacht Panzer infantrymen of the 164th Infantry Division. Ngati Porou soldiers among the Maoris called

Point 209 'Hikurangi' after their home mountain and C Company was ordered to attack the position on 26 March.

Point 209 was defended with intense mortar and machine gun fire but Ngarimu was one of the platoon leaders in charge of attacking the hill. His task was to attack and capture a feature forward of Point 209 and according to Lieutenant Colonel Charles Bennett, the commander of the battalion, "displaying courage and leadership of the highest order, [Ngarimu] was himself first on the hill crest, personally annihilating at least two enemy machine gun posts."

The hill was taken but "under cover of a most intense mortar barrage the enemy counterattacked" many times through the night

## **"NGARIMU THREW BACK THE ATTACKERS USING HIS MACHINE GUN AND EVEN THREW STONES IN HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT WHEN WEAPONS AND GRENADES HAD RUN OUT"**

of 26-27 March. Ngarimu was wounded twice in the shoulder and leg but refused to leave his men and instead led the defence. He also, "ordered his men to stand up and engage the enemy man for man." Ngarimu threw back the attackers using his machine gun and even threw stones in hand-to-hand combat when weapons and grenades had run out. Incredibly, the position held and thanks to what Bennett described as Ngarimu's "inspired leadership" the Maoris engaged the Germans "with such

good effect that the attackers were literally mown down."

During one of these counterattacks a part of the line was breached but Ngarimu immediately took control, "yelling out orders and encouragement, he rallied his men and led them in a fierce onslaught back into their old positions." By the morning of 27 March, the end was near and Ngarimu was still in possession of Point 209, but with only two unwounded men fighting with him.

Reinforcements were sent up but the Germans counterattacked once again and this time Ngarimu's luck ran out, as Bennett reported, "It was during this attack that 2nd Lieutenant Ngarimu was killed. He was killed on his feet defiantly facing the enemy with his

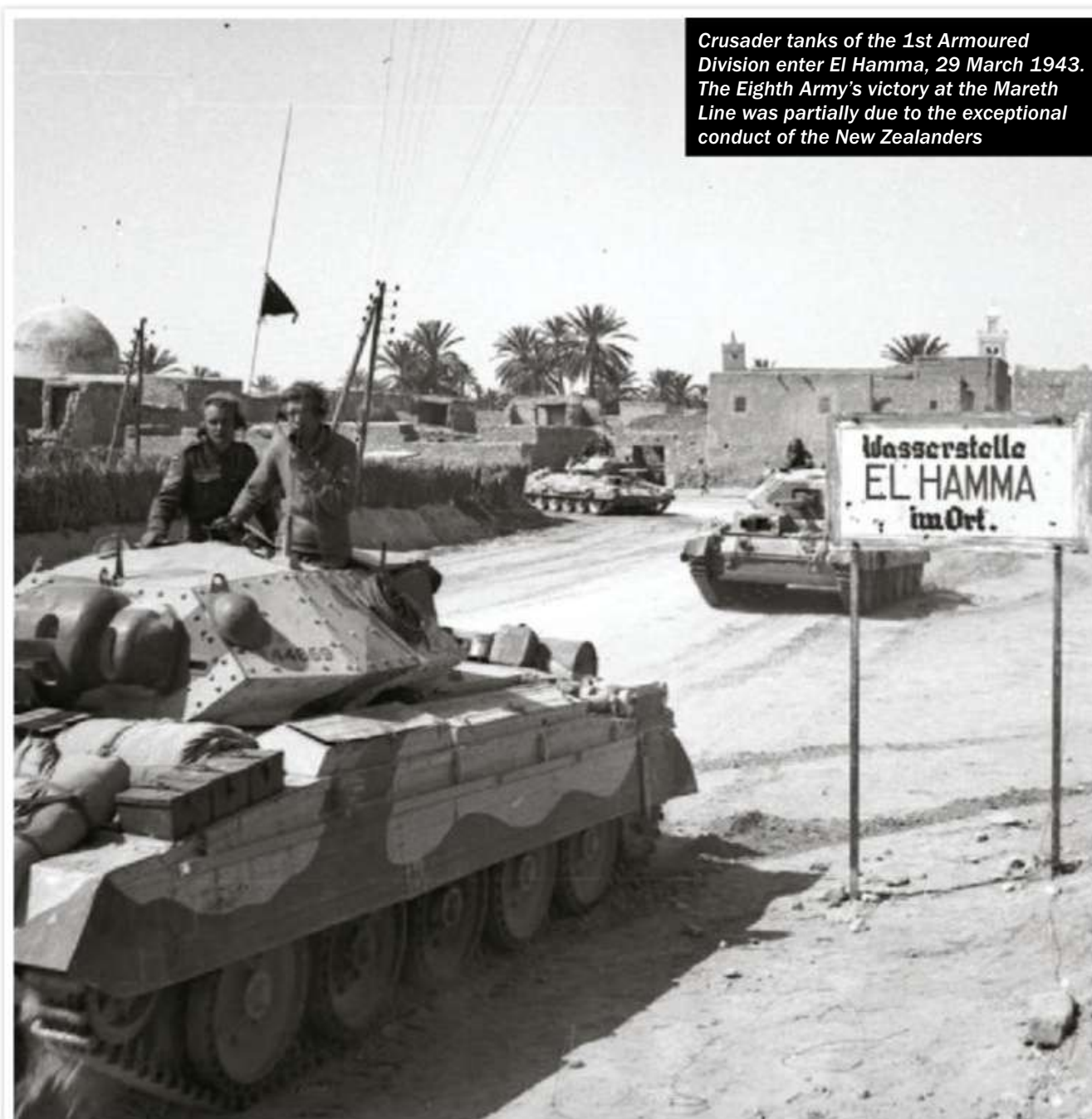
Tommy gun at his hip. As he fell he came to rest almost on top of those of the enemy who had fallen, the number of whom testified to his outstanding courage and fortitude."

Thanks to Ngarimu's courageous stand, the remaining Germans surrendered on Point 209 later that day. Three months later, Ngarimu was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross, the sixth to be awarded to a New Zealander during WWII and more significantly the first to a Maori soldier. On 6 October 1943 the Governor General of New Zealand Sir Cyril Newall addressed 7,000 people at Whakarua Park, Ruatoria who had gathered for Ngarimu's investiture ceremony. The attendees included his family, the prime minister of New Zealand and 1,300 schoolchildren who attended from across the country.

The news of Ngarimu's bravery and subsequent VC was also broadcast worldwide and Newall's address paid tribute to the courage of the Maoris, "It is fitting that we should, at this moment, consider the debt that we all owe to the Maori Battalion. By their deeds of valour they have won for themselves a place in the history of war. For centuries to come, they will be remembered with gratitude and praise by free men and women throughout the world. Maori tradition is full of stories of the courage of your forefathers. Your own sons and brothers have shown that they have inherited that courage to the full."

As for the brave lieutenant, "in making this award, the King not only honours Ngarimu himself, but through him, his Battalion and his country. No words of mine can adequately express my admiration for his courage."

Ngarimu's sacrifice was never forgotten and his legacy is still remembered positively today. Shortly after his death, a gathering of Maoris from the East Coast region discussed how to best commemorate Ngarimu's bravery and other members of the 28th Battalion who had been killed in the war. They decided to establish the "Ngarimu VC and 28th (Maori) Battalion Memorial Scholarships" to fund and promote Maori education and it is an initiative that is still a prized part of the New Zealand government's education department today.



*Crusader tanks of the 1st Armoured Division enter El Hamma, 29 March 1943. The Eighth Army's victory at the Mareth Line was partially due to the exceptional conduct of the New Zealanders*





**“ WITH A ROCKET  
LAUNCHER AND 6  
ROUNDS OF AMMUNITION,  
[HE] ADVANCED ALONE  
UNDER INTENSE MACHINE  
GUN AND 37-MM FIRE”**

**OFFICIAL CITATION FOR MASTER  
SERGEANT VLUG’S MEDAL OF HONOR**

*Vlug became a celebrity  
on his return home*





# DIRK J VLUG

## MEDAL OF HONOR

Under heavy machine gun fire, Dirk J Vlug took on five Japanese tanks in one of the most daring one-man assaults of WWII

**YEARS ACTIVE:** 1941-1951  
**CONFLICTS:** WORLD WAR II  
**RANK:** MASTER SERGEANT

**WORDS:** TOM FORDY

**F**or most, the heroics and courage of World War II are remembered as we've seen them celebrated on the big screen time and again: men of valour carrying out feats of immense bravery amid a barrage of explosions and gunfire, while the enemy advances in seemingly insurmountable numbers. Many real-life heroes would be made during World War II; few would be born from an act of such true cinematic-style spectacle as the then Private First Class Dirk J Vlug, who in December 1944 destroyed five enemy tanks.

Dirk was born in Maple Lake, Minnesota, on 20 August 1916 to Dutch immigrants Isaac and Mina Vlug. He was almost 25 when he joined the army, enlisting at Grand Rapids, Michigan, in April 1944. By December that year he was among the men of the 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division, holding a roadblock as they moved south on the Ormoc Road in the Philippine province of Leyte.

The US campaign in the Philippines – also known by the codenames Operation Musketeer I, II, and III, and not to be confused with the French operation of the same name, which led to the Suez Crisis – had begun only two months earlier under the supreme commander of the Southwest Pacific theatre of operations, Lieutenant General Douglas MacArthur. The directive was clear: expel the Japanese Army. The Philippines had been under a brutal occupation since 1942, with Filipinos subjected

to atrocities and forced into slave labour. Though the US had a strong relationship with the Philippines, in truth, it needed to be taken for its strategic positioning in the Southwest Pacific conflict – for both nations.

For Japan, keeping the islands meant holding key sea routes and ultimately survival in the war; for the US, taking the islands would be a crucial step in defeating the Japanese army.

On 20 October 1944, the US Sixth Army landed on the eastern shore of Leyte, beginning a sequence of conflicts known as

**“EACH BEND IN THE ROAD WAS TREACHEROUS: FOXHOLES WERE CARVED INTO THE EMBANKMENTS AND SPIDER HOLES DUG UNDER TREES”**

the Battle of Leyte Gulf. The Japanese forces underestimated the strength of the US air and naval forces and it would prove a decisive victory for the US. From there, American troops advanced westwards across Leyte, heading for the Ormoc Bay area.

Regaining control of Ormoc Valley was crucial. It linked with Leyte Valley to the east via the Ormoc Road, a long and winding

highway that ran through mountainous terrain and ravines. Once the valley was secured, it ensured access from east to west and offered strong military defences.

Despite resistance from the Japanese defensive units, the US troops continued forward; further landings reinforced their numbers, while Filipinos supported these efforts. On 10 December, they penetrated and took Ormoc City.

It was from this point that Vlug, along with the 126th and 127th Infantry Regiments of the 32nd Division, pushed south down the highway, with the aim of making a juncture with the XXIV Corps, squeezing the main defensive line of the Japanese 1st Division and ultimately securing the route between the two valleys.

Though the US forces had been dominant so far, Vlug and the 32nd Division faced fierce and tricky opposition. Ridges and ravines overlooked the highway from either side, covered in dense rainforest. The Japanese troops burrowed away at carefully selected defensive points, armed with heavily camouflaged machine guns and riflemen flanking the main artillery points.

Each bend in the road was more treacherous than the last: foxholes were carved into the embankments and spider holes dug under the roots of trees. With the steepness of the terrain and dense rainforest, the Japanese gunmen were near impossible to spot beyond a distance of 75 feet. It is said American troops needed





# ONE MAN VERSUS FIVE TANKS

## 20 OCTOBER 1944

HOW DIRK J VLUG TOOK ON FIVE ENEMY TANKS – AND CAME OUT VICTORIOUS

### 02 THE FIRST TANK

While the other US troops take cover, Pfc Vlug takes a rocket launcher and leaves his position of safety. Under heavy fire from machine guns and 37mm cannons, he charges forward, arms the launcher and destroys the first tank.

### 03 THE PISTOL SHOT

After spotting Vlug, troops emerge from the second tank and fire at him. He pulls his pistol and shoots one dead. The others retreat back into the tank, which he quickly takes out with the rocket launcher.

### 04 TAKING THE FLANK

As the three other tanks move forward, Vlug continues to advance under heavy fire and moves to the side. He is able to take out the third from a flanking position.

### 01 THE ROADBLOCK

The 32nd Division advances slowly south on the Ormoc Road, battling against tough resistance hidden under the cover of rainforest and mountainous terrain. After setting up a roadblock, five north-bound Japanese tanks approach.



## 05 THE FINAL TANK

After hitting and destroying the fourth, the fifth and final tank attempts to manoeuvre around the wreckages. Vlug hits it with his rocket launcher, sending the tank off course and crashing down a nearby steep embankment.

to be within “spitting distance” to identify and take out the machine guns.

Regardless, Vlug and the 32nd Division made a slow advance south, sometimes gaining only 30 or 40 yards each day. On 15 December, they set up a roadblock on the highway, where they were met by the advance of five Japanese tanks. In theory, the heavily armoured vehicles should have cut right through them.

Had Vlug stopped to consider his actions, what followed might never have happened. One can only assume he acted on pure adrenaline and instinct, knocking out all five tanks in a matter of minutes.

The first tank laid a smokescreen ahead of its trajectory to conceal its movement, and from behind the screen came heavy machine gun fire and relentless assault from 37mm cannon. The American troops took cover – all

where he fired the launcher and took it out. The remaining two tanks were now at close range of Vlug. Despite being under continuous fire, Vlug pressed forward with his attack, destroying a fourth tank with the launcher and then hitting the fifth as it attempted to move around the burning wreckage of the others. Losing control, the fifth tank careered off the road, plummeting down a steep embankment.

In what proved to be an interesting footnote, Vlug took time after the incident to capture photographs of the tanks he had single-handedly destroyed. His actions would be a decisive factor in the success of his battalion’s mission. Both the 126th and 127th Infantry Regiments continued south on the highway, with their respective 1st and 2nd Battalions winning bitterly fought victories against the pockets of Japanese resistance along the way.

By 21 December, the US forces approaching

## “WE CAN ONLY ASSUME HE ACTED ON PURE ADRENALINE AND INSTINCT, KNOCKING OUT ALL FIVE TANKS IN MINUTES”

except Pfc Vlug, who grabbed a rocket launcher and six rounds of ammunition. Leaving his covered position, he charged toward the road by himself. The Japanese troops aboard the first tank saw Vlug and concentrated their machine-gun fire directly at him.

Undeterred by the hail of bullets, Vlug loaded the rocket launcher and, with one accurate shot, destroyed the first tank. The second tank crunched to a stop and the troops dismounted, charging forward and opening fire on Vlug. Quickly, he pulled his pistol and opened fire, killing one of them and sending the rest fleeing back to the tank. Before they managed to get it moving forward again, Vlug struck them with his second rocket.

At this point, the other tanks continued to roll forward, unleashing their firepower at Vlug. He manoeuvred to the side and positioned himself on the flank of the third vehicle, from

from both the north and south met and closed the trap, ensuring the Sixth Army took control of the all-important Ormoc Valley. The battle for Leyte came to a successful conclusion, while the overall liberation of the Philippines islands was all but finished by April, with small instances of resistance continuing until Japan’s surrender on 15 August 1945.

Following his return to US soil, Pfc Vlug was awarded the Medal of Honor on 26 June 1946. After leaving the army, he joined the Michigan National Guard in May 1949 and retired six years later with the rank of master sergeant.

Dirk J Vlug passed away aged 79 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he has a street named after him, running adjacent to the Veterans’ Memorial Park. His actions on that day remain a pillar of American military valour, commendable in his defiance of dangerous, seemingly unbreakable opposition.

One of the photos taken by Vlug of the tanks he destroyed





# HEROES OF OVERLORD

The success of the Allied operation was often down to small but crucial acts of heroism

**DAVID JAMIESON**  
**YEARS ACTIVE:** 1939-48  
**FORCE:** BRITISH ARMY  
**RANK:** CAPTAIN

Jamieson's army career began early when he worked as a volunteer in the Territorial Army in 1939 aged just 19. Despite his young age, he was quickly promoted to second lieutenant. However, when his battalion went to France in 1940, he was considered too young to accompany them. Nevertheless, the intrepid young soldier soon followed, and by the time he turned 23, he had been promoted to captain of the 7th Battalion of the Royal Norfolk Regiment. On 7-8 August, Jamieson was in command of a company just south of Grimbosq, Normandy, a position he filled by being the only officer remaining.

The area offered the Germans useful cover to prepare their counter-attacks, so the company soon found itself under fire from the 12 Panzer Division. The men faced overwhelming odds against a slew of attacks from Tiger and Panzer tanks. Jamieson was witnessed mounting a British tank to relay information to the commander inside, all under heavy enemy fire. Through 36 hours of bitter fighting, and sustaining multiple wounds, the young captain motivated his men with determination and a cool head. Seven German counter-attacks were repulsed and the enemy suffered great losses, largely thanks to Jamieson's noble and courageous leadership, for which he later received the Victoria Cross.



*Jamieson refused to be evacuated even after being wounded in the arm and eye*



*Major General Matthew B. Ridgway (left) decorates Brigadier James Hill with the US Silver Star*

**JAMES HILL**  
**YEARS ACTIVE:** 1931-48  
**FORCE:** BRITISH ARMY  
**RANK:** BRIGADIER

In the days before D-Day, Brigadier Hill was placed in charge of the 3rd Parachute Brigade in the 6th Airborne Division. Formed solely for the Normandy landings, the brigade was full of volunteers who had no parachute experience, and Hill set about training them. He drove the men hard, including the clerks and telephone operators, urging them to practise in the dark and sending them on two-hour marches carrying 60 pounds of equipment.

In order to keep morale up, he introduced parachuting dogs and encouraged the men to go to church – something they later thanked him for. Before they went into the fray, he said to his men: “Gentlemen, in spite of your excellent training and very clear orders, don’t be daunted if chaos reigns – because it certainly will.”

When the brigade landed on the night of D-Day, Hill found himself in four and a half feet of water due to an inaccurate landing. He gathered the men he could find (about 42) and they tied themselves together. As enemy aircraft passed over, Hill threw himself on the man in front as the brigade was pummelled.

Although he was hit, Hill survived, but there was only one other man who was able to stand. After giving morphine to the injured, Hill pushed on knowing that as commander he had a responsibility to pursue the objective. He marched for four and a half hours to get to the original planned landing location, and once he discovered his battalion had achieved their objectives, he finally allowed the doctors to treat his severe wounds.

Refusing to allow much time for his recovery, Hill threw himself back into command and led a counter attack during a German assault. The bodies of the men of his brigade who had died were thrown into a big shell hole by the Germans, however, the area was soon recaptured and Hill made sure to unearth them and give them the burials they deserved.





Mynarski's Lancaster bomber was shot down while flying over northern France

Mynarski was 27 when he died

**ANDREW MYNARSKI**  
**YEARS ACTIVE: 1940-44**  
**FORCE: ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE**  
**RANK: PILOT OFFICER**

After the D-Day attacks, on 12 June 1944, Mynarski was flying aboard a Lancaster bomber preparing for a raid on northern France. Although the crew reached their target, they were spotted by the enemy and the plane was pummelled with cannon fire.

The men were ordered to bail out, but as Mynarski went to leave, he noticed that one of the officers, Pat Brophy, was stuck in his turret. Mynarski immediately went back through the flames to help Brophy, using

whatever he could get his hands on to free the trapped pilot. Noticing that Mynarski's parachute and flight suit were both on fire, Brophy signalled him to leave. Mynarski eventually complied; when he reached the door, he turned, saluted and said "good night, sir" before jumping.

Due to his burning parachute lines, Mynarski dropped rapidly, and although he survived the impact, he was severely burned. He was taken to a German field hospital but died of his wounds. By a miracle, Brophy managed to survive the crash, and when he learned of Mynarski's death, told the story of his valiant efforts to save him. Mynarski was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for "valour of the highest order."

**JOHN G BURKHALTER**  
**YEARS ACTIVE: 1942-69**  
**FORCE: UNITED STATES ARMY**  
**RANK: LIEUTENANT COLONEL**

Burkhalter was an unlikely soldier – in 1935, he was named senior pastor of a Baptist church in Florida, however, he decided to combine his faith with his military career. He was assigned to the 1st Infantry Division in 1943 and landed on Omaha Beach on D-Day. A letter that he wrote to his wife was printed in the *Miami Daily News*, bringing the public a true account of the horrors experienced by those



fighting on the beaches. Burkhalter's regiment formed part of the front line and he described the soldiers alongside him as having great courage.

As he witnessed men being killed by artillery shells he prayed intensely, saying that "danger was everywhere; death was not far off." Witnessing death all around him, the pastor crawled up the high hills along the beach with his fellow soldiers. When the battle was over, he administered blessings to the dead Allied and German troops.

Burkhalter went on to fight in the battle of the Bulge, where he sustained multiple head injuries. After the battle he was declared 'missing in action' until he turned up in a French hospital. For his immense bravery he was awarded the Purple Heart, Bronze Star and the Silver Star.

**STANLEY HOLLIS**  
**YEARS ACTIVE: 1939-44**  
**FORCE: BRITISH ARMY**  
**RANK: COMPANY SERGEANT MAJOR**

Born in Middlesbrough, young Stanley Hollis worked in his father's fish and chip shop as a boy. When he was old enough, he joined the merchant navy, but he was struck with blackwater fever and forced to return home. With two young children to support, he became a lorry driver, but he joined the army with the Green Howards shortly before war broke out and quickly rose through the ranks to become a company sergeant major.

After landing at the beaches on D-Day, Hollis went with his commander to investigate two German pillboxes. Hollis fearlessly rushed into one pillbox and took all but five of the Germans prisoner. He quickly dealt with the second, taking 26 prisoners.

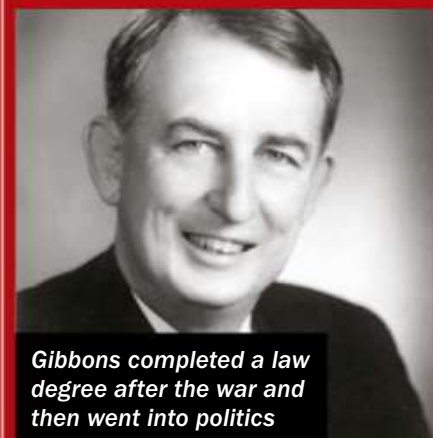
Just hours later he discovered that two of his men had been left behind after an unsuccessful raid. Simply saying "I took them in, I will try to get them out," he went back alone. Facing enemies armed with machine guns, he distracted their attention with a grenade. Although it failed to go off, it gave him enough time to run in, shoot them down, and rescue his men.

In recognition of his gallantry, Hollis was the only soldier to be awarded a Victoria Cross on D-Day.

**SAM GIBBONS**  
**YEARS ACTIVE: 1941-45**  
**FORCE: UNITED STATES ARMY**  
**RANK: CAPTAIN**

Although he is now remembered for his work in the political world, Gibbons postponed his law education to serve as a second lieutenant, and eventually captain, after the outbreak of World War II. He was a member of the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment when it landed near Carentan, France, on D-Day. Aged just 24, Gibbons landed in a field and followed the sound of metal clickers to find his fellow paratroopers.

On 13 June, the battalion went head to head in a battle against German tanks as the main German force moved towards Carentan. The relentless battle raged from 6am to 10pm, with only 400 of the 600 paratroopers who began that day still alive by the end. Against tremendous odds the men managed to restore their line of defence. From where Gibbons was positioned, he saw a dozen burning tanks. For his brave actions he was awarded the Bronze Star, and the conflict was later immortalised in the war drama *Band Of Brothers*. Many who knew him best said that he went into politics not to win wars, but to make them unnecessary.



Gibbons completed a law degree after the war and then went into politics



Hollis's VC citation stated "he saved the lives of many of his men"





# **SURVIVING** **STALAG LUFT III**

**AN INTERVIEW WITH  
AIR COMMODORE CHARLES CLARKE OBE**

This Bomber Command veteran was a witness to the legendary 'Great Escape' and lived through the infamous 'Long March' of Allied POWs through Germany

*German guards  
keeping a close watch  
over Allied POWs from  
a tower in 1943*



*Inset, right: Clarke photographed shortly after the war. He remained in the RAF and went on to serve in Palestine and during the Aden Emergency*



WORDS TOM GARNER

**A**part from Colditz Castle, no other prisoner-of-war camp of World War II captures the public imagination quite like Stalag Luft III: a vast complex of wooden huts, compounds, barbed wire and guard towers. The camp became most famous for the mass breakout that occurred on 24-25 March 1944 when dozens of Allied POWs escaped through a tunnel. This event later became the stuff of cinematic legend, but for those who were held captive in Stalag Luft III the actual experience of being a POW was a hard endurance test of almost continual suffering.

One of those who survived was Charles Clarke, who was then a teenage pilot officer in RAF 619 Squadron. Now a retired air commodore, Clarke is one of the few men still alive who not only witnessed the 'Great Escape' but also survived a little-known but horrendous forced march through central Europe that killed many Allied prisoners of war, known as the 'Long March'. The following is a gritty endurance story where Hollywood myth collides with the grim but courageous reality.

### Joining the RAF

Clarke joined the RAF in 1941 and was a keen recruit. "The war was on and like other schoolboys I was enamoured with the Royal Air Force. I had flown when I was about eight in a De Havilland Dragon Rapide and came across the RAF in about 1937 when I went to a flying display at Hendon. I then volunteered in 1941."

However, Clarke's initial enthusiasm was dampened when he went to Oxford for his RAF examination. "We slept overnight in a cinema, and the chap in the bed next to me was a sergeant at the nearby airfield. He was on Wellingtons and told me about how many people they were losing, and it really made my hair stand on end. About a week or two later I saw the documentary film *Target For Tonight*, and it again showed how RAF losses were higher over Germany. I thought afterwards, 'Perhaps I'm not doing the right thing.'"

Although he was accepted into the RAF, Clarke's dawning awareness of the air force's dangers would prove to be justified. During WWII, 55,573 RAF personnel were killed flying with Bomber Command, which was a death rate of 44.4 per cent. Its prolonged bombing offensive against Nazi Germany was extremely destructive, and Clarke flew in the thick of it. After being sworn in, Clarke went through an

**"FOR THOSE WHO WERE HELD CAPTIVE IN STALAG LUFT III, THE ACTUAL EXPERIENCE OF BEING A POW WAS A HARD ENDURANCE TEST OF ALMOST CONTINUAL SUFFERING"**



MILITARY HEROES OF THE 20TH CENTURY

extended period of training across England before he was posted to learn skills such as navigation and Morse code. He had ambitions to become a pilot, but after initial flying training contracted mumps. “I was hospitalised for several weeks, and when I came back my course had finished so I was taken off flying training. I was told that I had to go into the pilot navigation bomb-aimer scheme, and it really upset me. I cried because I didn’t want to be taken off the pilot’s training course, but it probably saved my life.”

Now assigned as a bomb-aimer, Clarke trained on Wellington medium bombers before moving onto the Avro Lancaster. His crewmembers were self-selected among themselves in a process that Clarke recalls as being similar to “a dating game. You virtually chose each other.” Despite this unusual selection method, Clarke speaks fondly of his seven-man Lancaster crew: “There were never any problems. The navigator, pilot and myself were commissioned and the rest were sergeants. It’s rather sad that whenever anyone talks about Bomber Command they speak in terms of officers, but people forget that two-thirds of the crews were NCOs.”

Raids over Germany

Now commissioned as a pilot officer, Clarke and his crew were assigned to 619 Squadron at Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire, although it was an unfortunate time to begin active service. “When I joined 619 Squadron the loss rate was very high because it was the peak of the Bomber Command offensive. People would go out and you’d never see them again. It was amazing how

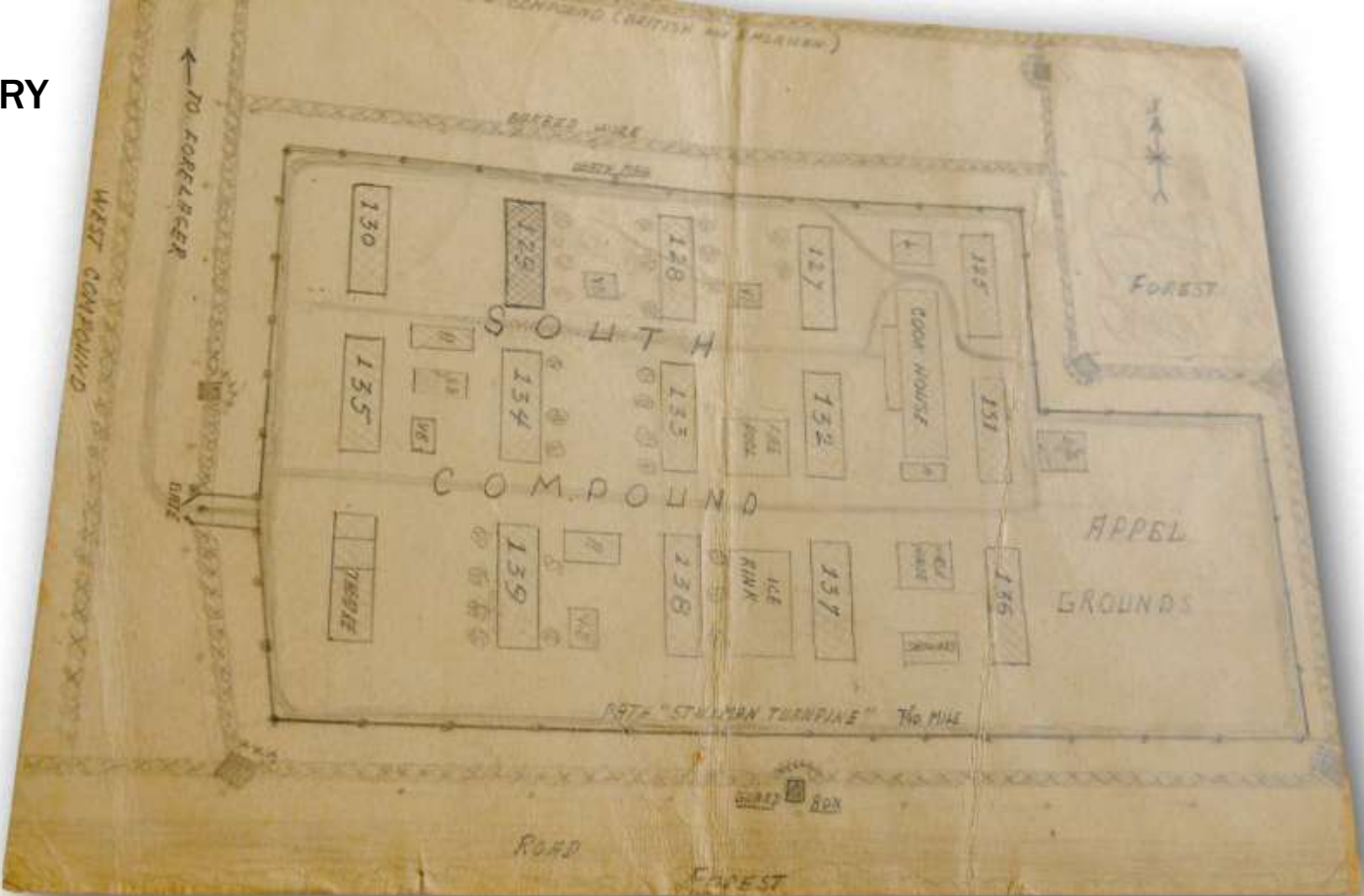
efficiently their kit was removed afterwards.” Clarke flew 18 missions in a Lancaster bomber between 1943-44, including the Battle of Berlin. This extensive campaign against the German capital resulted in the loss of nearly 500 RAF aircraft and over 2,500 aircrew killed. Clarke flew six missions to Berlin and recalls that survival rates were very low: “It was a matter of luck whether you survived. You were on a long flight and were being attacked by enemy aircraft with a superior performance. They had better guns with a higher calibre and range. They had also been in flight for about an hour whereas we’d been up for around ten hours, so you were a sitting duck. If an enemy fighter picked you up you’d almost certainly

Above: The American South Compound of Stalag Luft III as drawn by US prisoner Lieutenant Robert M Pollich. The drawing depicts various huts, wire fences, guard towers and even an ice rink

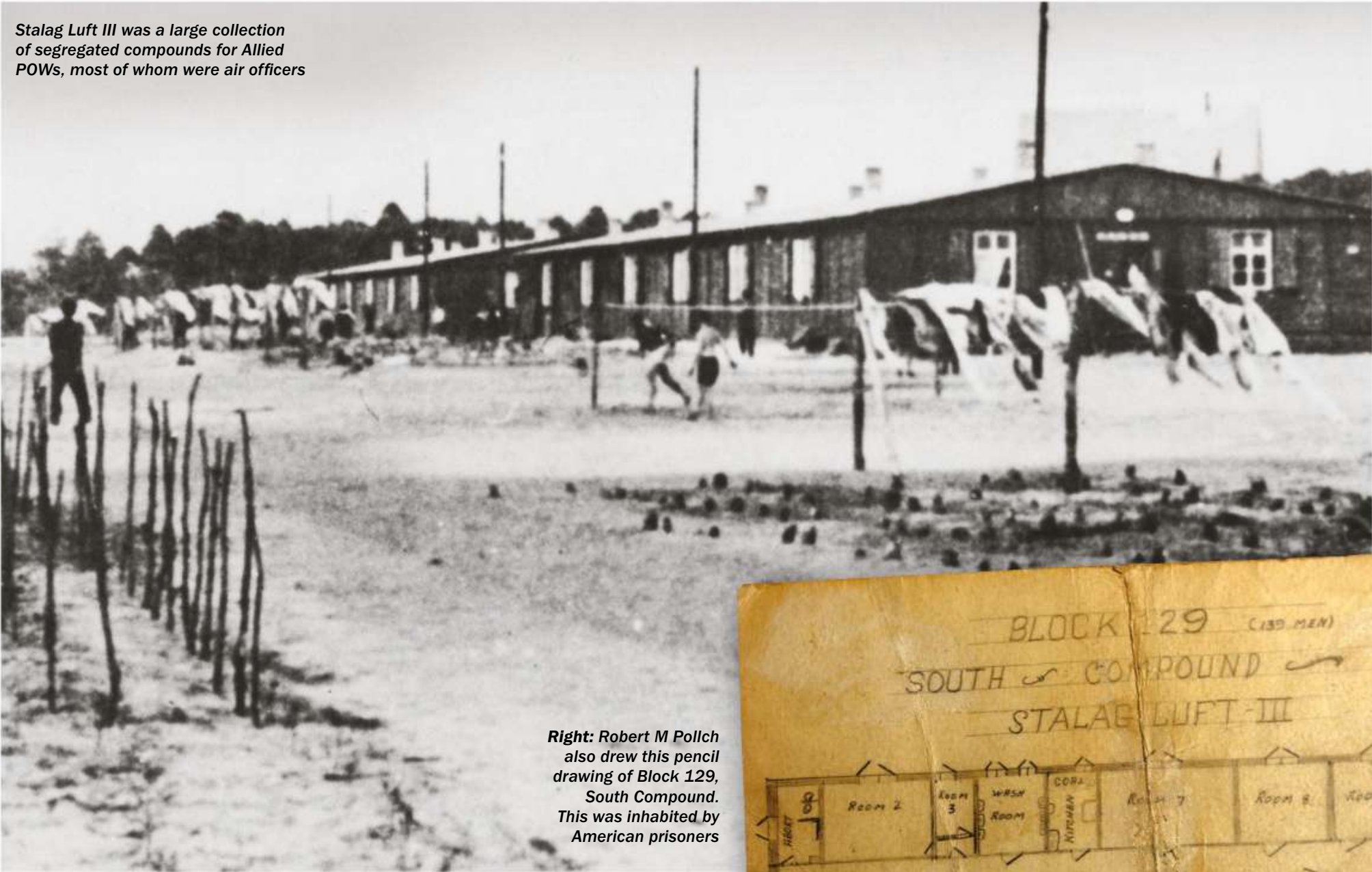
had it. There might have been a small percent chance of escaping, but it was very low. Ultimately, survivors were just lucky.”

Capture

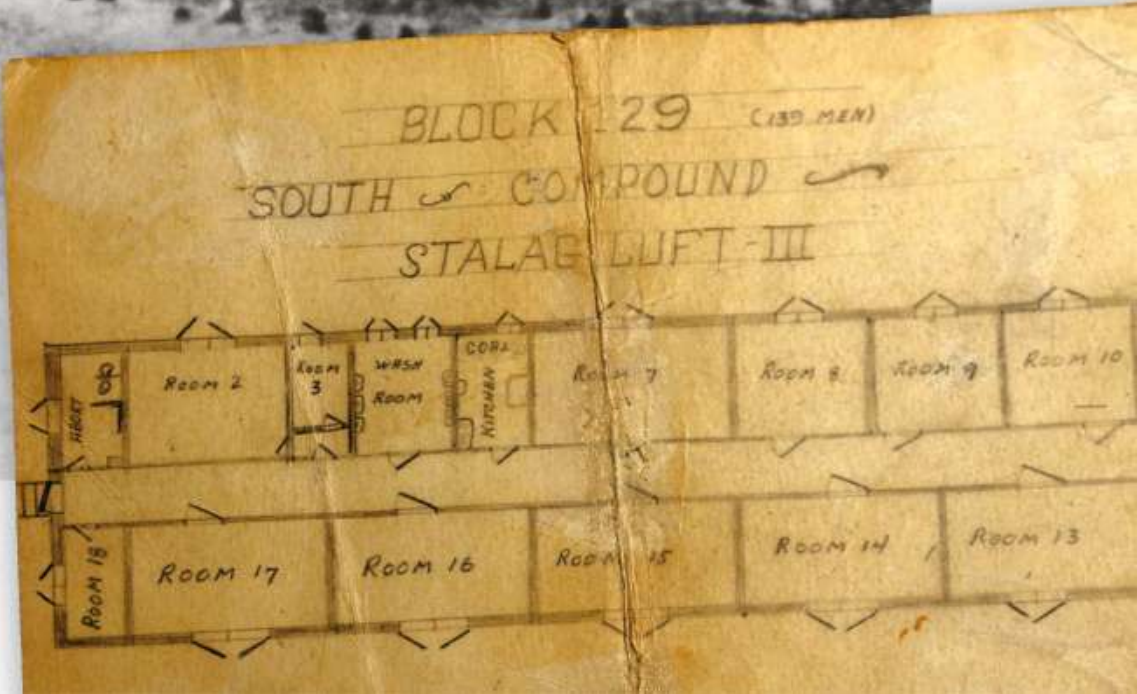
Clarke’s own luck ran out in February 1944 when his Lancaster was shot down over Schweinfurt in Germany. “We were hit and the whole aircraft was on fire, with the wing coming off. I waited until it was obvious that we all had to get out and I bailed out.” Bailing out from the burning aircraft was a daunting



Stalag Luft III was a large collection of segregated compounds for Allied POWs, most of whom were air officers



Right: Robert M Pollich also drew this pencil drawing of Block 29, South Compound. This was inhabited by American prisoners





# 619 SQUADRON

Charles Clarke's bombing unit was short lived, but it took part in notable operations and contained many decorated airmen

619 Squadron was active from 18 April 1943 until its disbandment on 18 July 1945. It was formed out of elements of 97 Squadron and was equipped with Avro Lancaster bomber aircraft. Although the squadron was based at Woodhall Spa, it had to move several times within Lincolnshire, including bases at Coningsby, Dunholme Lodge, Strubby and Skellingthorpe.

The squadron's main tasks were bombing operations over Germany, and its last mission involved attacking SS barracks at Berchtesgaden near Adolf Hitler's Alpine retreat. 619 Squadron also laid mines in Norway and participated in Operation Exodus, which repatriated Allied POWs.

Although it only existed for two years, 619 Squadron was mentioned ten times in dispatches, and its members were awarded 76 DFCs (Distinguished Flying Cross), 37 DFMs (Distinguished Flying Medal) and one DSO (Distinguished Service Order).

**"THE SQUADRON'S MAIN TASKS WERE BOMBING OPERATIONS OVER GERMANY"**



A navigator of 619 Squadron, Flying Officer P Ingleby, surveys charts in his Lancaster at RAF Coningsby

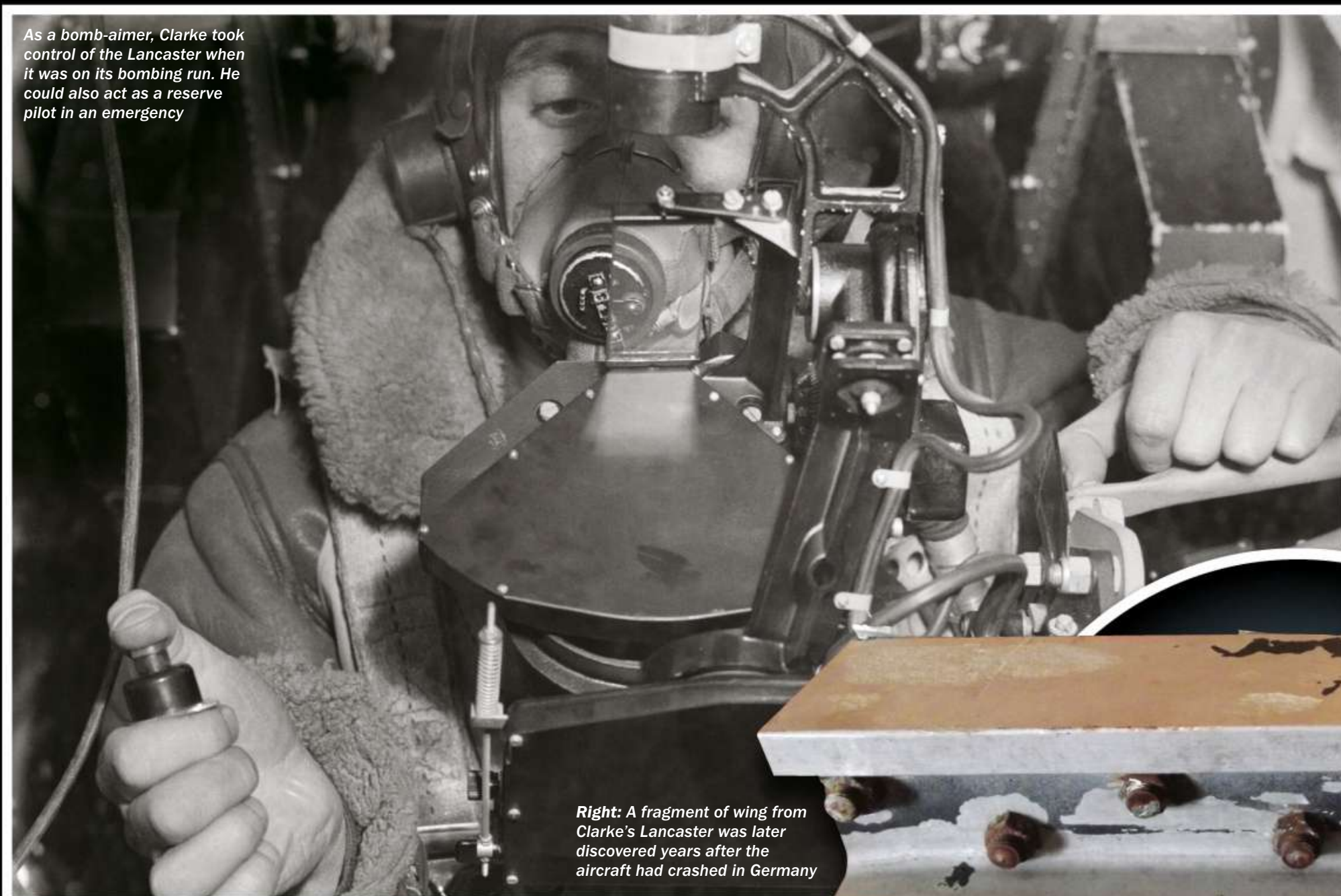


Clarke (top row, second from right) with his Lancaster crew in 619 Squadron. Three of these men were killed when their aircraft was shot down



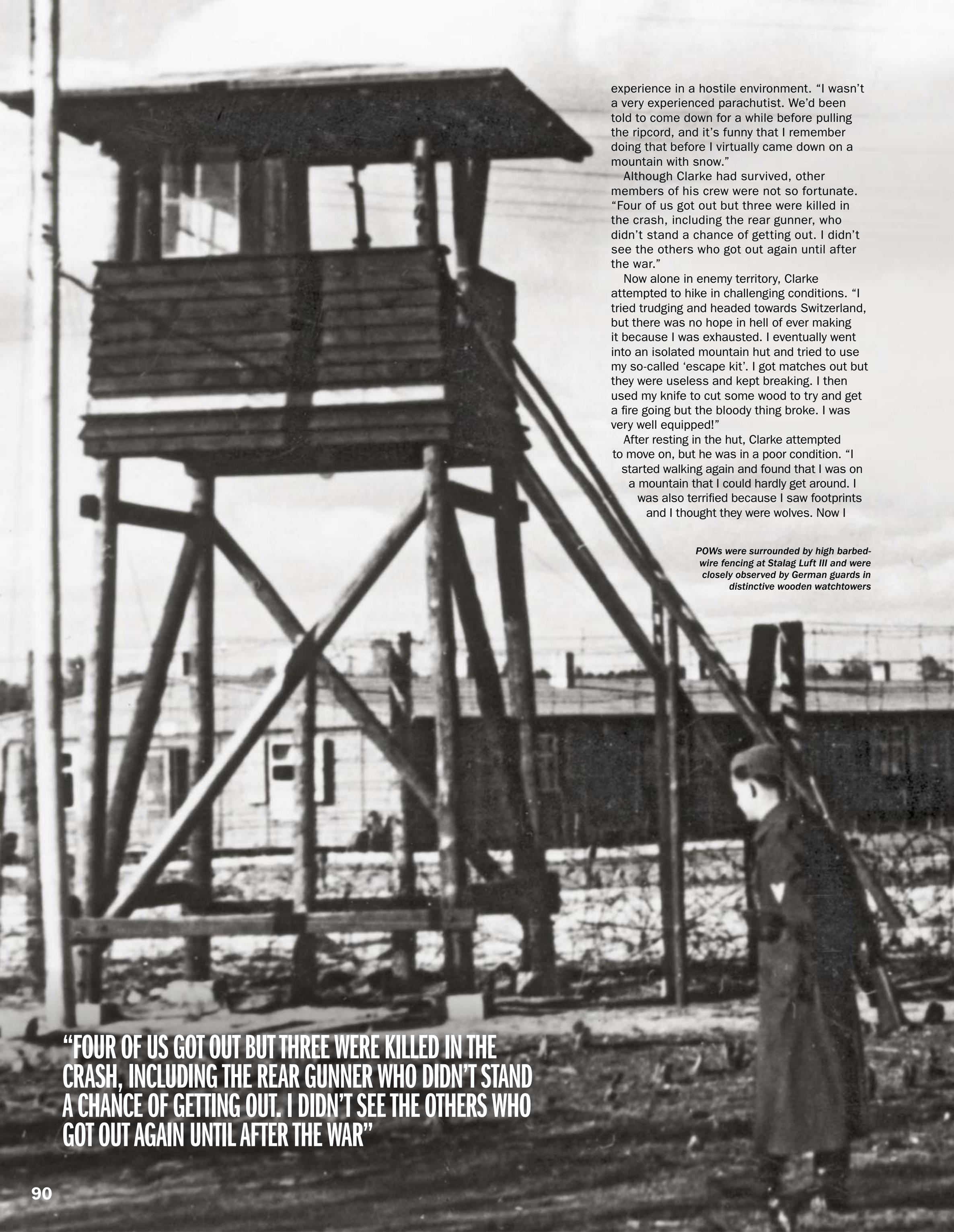
A Lancaster bomber of 619 Squadron. Clarke flew 18 missions in the squadron before his aircraft was shot down over Germany

As a bomb-aimer, Clarke took control of the Lancaster when it was on its bombing run. He could also act as a reserve pilot in an emergency



Right: A fragment of wing from Clarke's Lancaster was later discovered years after the aircraft had crashed in Germany





experience in a hostile environment. "I wasn't a very experienced parachutist. We'd been told to come down for a while before pulling the ripcord, and it's funny that I remember doing that before I virtually came down on a mountain with snow."

Although Clarke had survived, other members of his crew were not so fortunate. "Four of us got out but three were killed in the crash, including the rear gunner, who didn't stand a chance of getting out. I didn't see the others who got out again until after the war."

Now alone in enemy territory, Clarke attempted to hike in challenging conditions. "I tried trudging and headed towards Switzerland, but there was no hope in hell of ever making it because I was exhausted. I eventually went into an isolated mountain hut and tried to use my so-called 'escape kit'. I got matches out but they were useless and kept breaking. I then used my knife to cut some wood to try and get a fire going but the bloody thing broke. I was very well equipped!"

After resting in the hut, Clarke attempted to move on, but he was in a poor condition. "I started walking again and found that I was on a mountain that I could hardly get around. I was also terrified because I saw footprints and I thought they were wolves. Now I

*POWs were surrounded by high barbed-wire fencing at Stalag Luft III and were closely observed by German guards in distinctive wooden watchtowers*

**"FOUR OF US GOT OUT BUT THREE WERE KILLED IN THE CRASH, INCLUDING THE REAR GUNNER WHO DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE OF GETTING OUT. I DIDN'T SEE THE OTHERS WHO GOT OUT AGAIN UNTIL AFTER THE WAR"**



realise they were just mountain goats, but it shows the state I was in."

Clarke eventually found a way off the mountain and got onto a road alongside a frozen river, where he was captured. "I came down and saw some German soldiers, but they were not looking for me, they were looking for an American crew that had come down later. I thought I would run across the frozen river but they fired, and for me the war was over. The Germans couldn't believe how young I was because I had only just turned 19. I looked young and you could almost hear them saying, "They've got children flying!"

After his capture, Clarke was imprisoned. "I was taken to a place that was more of a police station than a prison and put in solitary confinement. I shouted out, hoping to hear from the other three crewmembers that had been shot down, but the Germans eventually told me to shut up in a very harsh tone. I then started singing. I'd been to a theatre in London about a week before to see a show, and the main song was *Don't Get Around Much Anymore*. I started singing that and I'm sure I got an answer!"

Clarke was then transferred to an airfield, where he was almost killed. "I remember being taken to a guardroom where there was a German NCO and two airmen. Suddenly there was a shot and a bullet ricocheted. I thought the man had tried to kill me and I swore at him, but the gun was torn off him."

Conditions only got worse for Clarke as he was moved between several locations, including Dulag Luft, which was a POW

## "THE STATION WAS CROWDED, AND I THINK THEY WANTED TO LYNCH ME. I WAS VERY GLAD TO HAVE THE PROTECTION OF THE LUFTWAFFE AIRMEN"

interrogation centre for captured aircrew. "We were put in a very small room with one little window. I was interrogated and asked for my number, rank and name etc. I don't know how many days I was there for because you were just in this bloody small box the whole time. Then I was eventually taken out with an escort of three Germans to a station with a very big town nearby."

At the station Clarke was subjected to the fury of local townspeople. "The station was crowded and I think they wanted to lynch me. I was very glad to have the protection of the Luftwaffe airmen. We got on a train and they turfed people out of a compartment before I was taken to Sagan."

Sagan (now Zagan in Poland) was a fateful location for Clarke because the Silesian town was not far from his ultimate destination: Stalag Luft III.

### The 'big breakout'

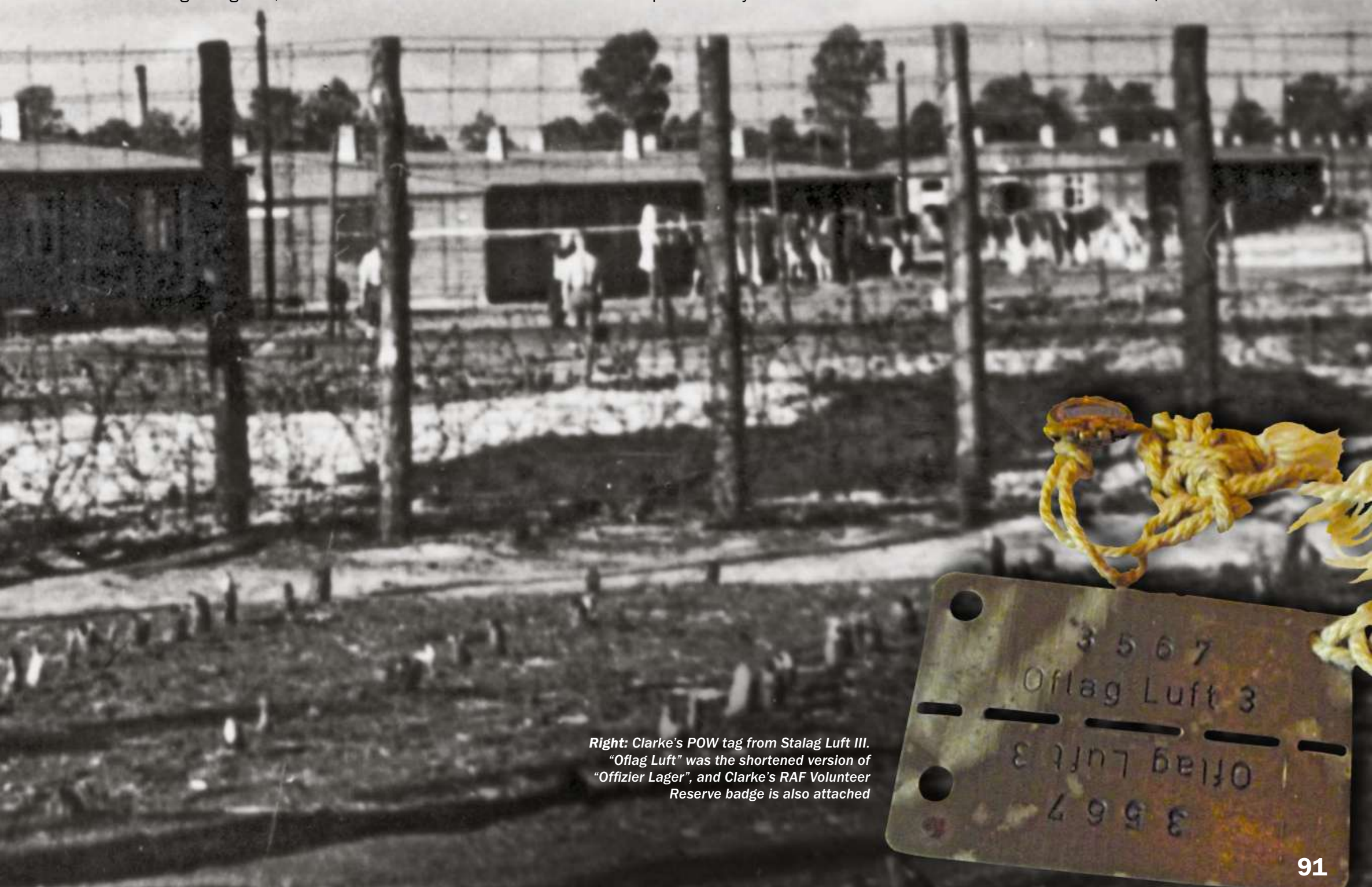
Officially known as 'Stammlager Luft III', the famous POW camp was run by the Luftwaffe

and primarily held captured Allied air officers. Opened in March 1942, the camp consisted of several compounds where Allied nationalities were separated. British and Commonwealth airmen (of both the RAF and Fleet Air Arm) were imprisoned in North Compound while South Compound was opened for US personnel in September 1943. Although commissioned officers made up the bulk of the prisoners, there were extended compounds for NCOs, and non-airmen were also occasionally held.

Each compound consisted of 15 single-storey huts that could sleep around 15 men per room in five triple-deck bunks. Stalag Luft III eventually grew to 60 acres and was the home of 2,500 British air officers, 7,500 from the US Army Air Force and approximately 900 officers from other Allied air forces.

It was into this large camp that Clarke arrived, but before he could settle in he was subjected to one last interrogation. "When we got there we were interrogated (although 'questioned' is probably a better word) by our own people. This was because they were afraid of people infiltrating [the POWs], and I was thrust into a room of 12-16 other people."

The 'infiltration' that the more experienced POW officers were worried about was a security concern, because when Clarke arrived deep progress was being made on preparations for a mass breakout. Three tunnels had been constructed, but only one had been successfully completed. The preparations were detailed, and Clarke had arrived just in time to be a witness to the 'Great Escape'.



Right: Clarke's POW tag from Stalag Luft III. "Oflag Luft" was the shortened version of "Offizier Lager", and Clarke's RAF Volunteer Reserve badge is also attached



Clarke soon became aware of the plan. “We quickly knew that there was going to be a big breakout, and the security was remarkably good.” Nevertheless, Clarke had arrived late and at 19 was deemed too young to take a prominent part in preparations. “I met the inner circle but didn’t know them well. I was a new boy – and I emphasise the word ‘boy’ rather than a man. All of the planning had been going on for years. Most of the people who went through the tunnel had been prisoners of war for at least a year.”

Despite not being given a place in the tunnel, Clarke still played a small part in the security for the escape. “I acted as a ‘stooge’, which was a guard or sentry. One of the things was that they had people scattered throughout the camp who used signals. For example, if you stood up it meant that there was a ‘Goon’ [German guard] nearby. It was all low-key stuff.”

When everything was prepared, the escapees waited for the best time to break out, which was the moonless night of 24-25 March 1944. 200 Allied POWs lined up to escape from the tunnel, although there were no Americans, as Clarke explains: “People often ask why there were no Americans in the camp but the answer is very simple. In the weeks before the Great Escape the Americans had been moved to a new US

## “WE WERE KEPT OUT IN THE SNOW VIRTUALLY ALL DAY THE FOLLOWING DAY WHILE THEY COUNTED AND RECOUNTED US”

camp. We were in North Camp, and the move saved their lives of course.”

The night of the escape featured an Allied air raid nearby. Clarke recalls the escapees’ progress: “Before the air raid there were movements of people within the huts, and it was all done quietly. Those who were going through the tunnel got into Hut 104 so that they could be the first away.” Clarke also remembers when the Germans discovered the escape: “When the lights came on after the air raid had finished the escape became obvious to the Germans. We heard a shot and we knew the game was up.”

The escape has since become the subject of many myths, and the incident involving the German gunshot is one that Clarke is keen to clarify: “You hear lots of nonsense. I’ve heard one chap say, ‘I was in the tunnel when they fired the shot. Fortunately there was a curve in the tunnel otherwise I would have been killed.’

That was absolute rubbish: your head had to be straight so you could pull the trolleys along. Also, the shot that was fired was above ground, and the guard had fired a warning shot.”

Despite several setbacks, 76 Allied POWs had successfully escaped. Clarke recalls that the Germans’ immediate response was severe: “We were kept out in the snow virtually all day the following day while they counted and recounted us. They got no help from us because we kept moving around to confuse them. This went on for several days, and they stopped all rations and lots of other things. We were subjected to harsher treatment after the escape and there was also a huge manhunt.”

Eventually, the prisoners learned the awful fate of the escapees. “There were many more searches, and then of course the news came back to the camp commandant that 50 had been murdered. He called the British senior officer in and told him that 50 had been shot escaping. Fortunately, that officer was due to be repatriated the following week due to a gammy leg so he was able to report directly to parliament. It was then that [Foreign Secretary] Anthony Eden said that justice would be asserted.”

Although the escape was audacious, Clarke recounts the bleak statistics: “Eventually, two or three escapees came back to the camp, which

# INSIDE THE GREAT ESCAPE

The breakout of March 1944 was meticulously prepared and involved three tunnels, hundreds of prisoners and vast amounts of improvisation

In early 1943, Squadron Leader Roger Bushell devised an audacious plan for a mass breakout from Stalag Luft III. Bushell was the head of the camp’s escape committee and proposed building three tunnels simultaneously so that 200 men could break out in a single attempt.

The tunnels were codenamed ‘Tom’, ‘Dick’ and ‘Harry’ and over 600 prisoners eventually became involved in their construction. Located at a depth of nine metres (30 feet) and designed to run more than 90 metres (300 feet) into the outside woods, the tunnels were certainly ambitious. However, at only 0.9 square metres (two square feet) in size, they were extremely small, and working underground in sandy subsoil required great courage and ingenuity.

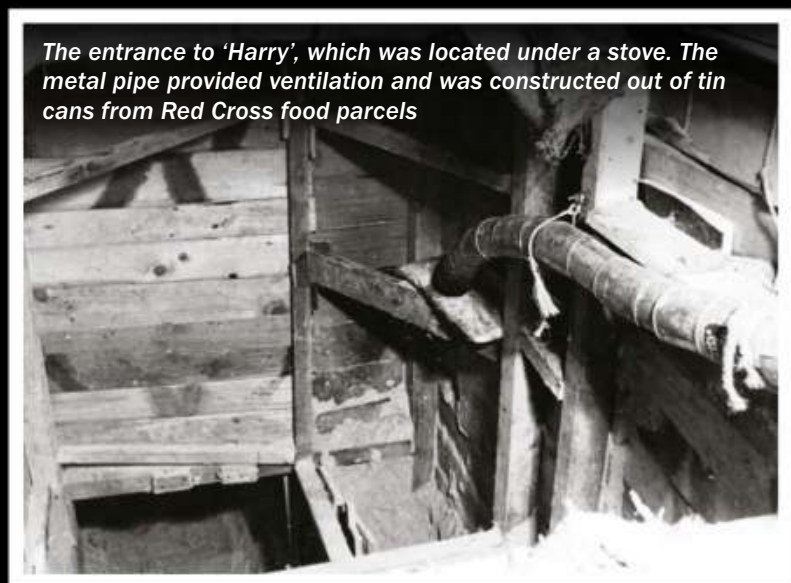
Bed boards were used en masse to prop up the tunnels; candles were made from worn clothing and soup fat, while tin cans could be turned into tools or ventilation ducting. As progress continued, the tunnels became more elaborate. Electric lights were installed and hooked into the camp’s power grid, while most famously a small rail system was developed. Rope-pulled wooden trolleys were essential in removing tons of soil over 12 months, and

they even had stopping points that prisoners nicknamed ‘Piccadilly Circus’ and ‘Leicester Square’ after London Underground stations.

Escape preparations were not just confined to tunnelling. Skilled forgers made maps, false documents, compasses and civilian clothes while dispersers scattered the tunnels’ soil around the camp using hidden pouches in their trousers. All of these operations were also covered by an excellent security system. Prisoners became highly adept at distracting the German guards or acting as ‘Stooges’ (including Clarke) who could subtly alert the working escapees of potential enemy approaches or flashpoints.

Despite these intricate plans, the Germans discovered ‘Tom’ in September 1943 and ‘Dick’ was abandoned to be used as storage. Only ‘Harry’ was used for the breakout of 24-25 March 1944, when 76 officers escaped. After the escape, the Germans compiled a list of missing materials, and the statistics were extraordinary. The prisoners had used, among other items, 4,000 bed boards, 3,424 towels, 1,699 blankets, 305 metres (1,000 feet) of electric wire, 180 metres (600 feet) of rope, 30 shovels and 478 spoons.

The entrance to ‘Harry’, which was located under a stove. The metal pipe provided ventilation and was constructed out of tin cans from Red Cross food parcels

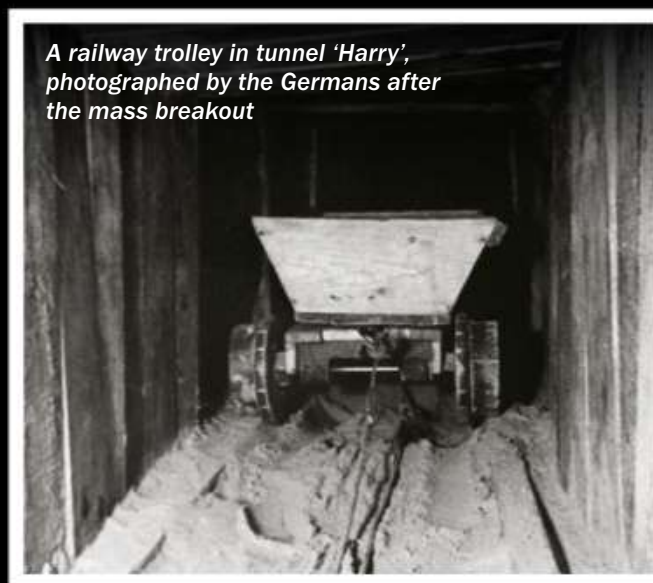


Dutch pilot Bram van der Stok was one of only three prisoners from the breakout to successfully escape enemy territory, along with Norwegian airmen Per Bergsland and Jens Müller



South African-born Roger Bushell masterminded the Great Escape and was one of the 76 escapees. He was recaptured and murdered by the Gestapo

A railway trolley in tunnel ‘Harry’, photographed by the Germans after the mass breakout





was surprising. They included Jimmy James, who was a great man and a friend of mine. About 70-odd went through the tunnel; 50 were murdered, two or three successfully escaped and the rest were brought back. After the Great Escape, escaping was forbidden by the British because of the risk that people would be shot again."

### A fearful time

The murder of the 50 escapees cast a shadow over the camp, and prisoners feared for their lives. "For the rest of our time at Stalag Luft III we kept wondering what was going to happen to us. After the other prisoners were shot we wondered if we would also be murdered. We even planned to defend ourselves with cudgels – it was really ridiculous because we wouldn't have stood a cat in hell's chance."

With escaping now banned, the prisoners eagerly waited for news that might lead to their liberation. "When the invasion of France occurred we thought we would be released the following week. How naïve we were, because the war went on for months after that, but we followed its progress. We had an illegal radio, and a South African newspaper reporter wrote the news down in shorthand. He would turn out a bulletin and it would be read out in each hut despite there being guards all around us."

**Right:** Clarke's knife, fork and spoon from Stalag Luft III were made in Germany, and the spoon was stamped with the badge of the Luftwaffe

Despite possessing the illegal radio, the Germans did not go out of their way to find it. "The Germans had a map that followed things according to their own radio, but it is reputed that the commandant asked our senior British officer how the war was going! He knew damn well we had the radio."

Although camp life was extremely tense, especially after the escape, the prisoners did find creative outlets in staging improvised theatre shows. "The Germans allowed some prisoners to build a theatre, and it was done very well. It amazes me how they allowed these theatricals to take place. I think the Red Cross brought in some clothing, and the plays they put on were out of this world. So many actors started out their careers that way. The camp had so much talent in it and they were a remarkable collection of people."

The theatre was not only a breeding ground for thespian talent, but also a useful location for another hidden tunnel. "It was under a corner of the theatre and used as a store, although it was



incomplete. I went down it and it's rumoured that sketches of the camp were hidden there, that were later used as a basis for the film *The Great Escape*. These drawings were put in a tube, stored and recovered after the war."



Although it contained many historical inaccuracies, *The Great Escape* movie made the 1944 breakout famous around the world





After the war, the RAF Police led an extensive investigation into the Stalag Luft III murders. 72 men were eventually identified, and many were tried, executed or imprisoned



The memorial to the 50 men who were executed following the Great Escape near Zagan, Poland. Adolf Hitler personally ordered their execution



Two survivors of the Long March stand in front of a damaged Arado Ar 96 at Celle airfield, 18 April 1945

## The 'Long March'

The unease within Stalag Luft III ended in early January 1945 when the Germans evacuated the camp. However, the prisoners were now subjected to an extremely harsh experience that became infamous as the 'Long March'. Clarke prepared for what he knew would be an arduous journey. "The Russians were about 32 kilometres (20 miles) away, and we could hear their gunfire. We were told that we were going to be evacuated, and I made a sledge on the last day out of a Red Cross box and put a couple of runners on the side. I pulled nails out of something, but how I got them in I don't know."

In a last-minute attempt to eat some food, Clarke resorted to a desperate measure. "I remember breaking into the so-called cookhouse, which was a hut where they used to do the hot water for our tea and coffee. I cut off a piece of meat from a carcass that was hanging there and half-cooked it, which didn't do me any good at all. When I look back it's a lesson in how not to do things!"

What Clarke was about to experience was a forced march from Poland into Germany. Between January-April 1945 tens of thousands of Allied POWs were forced to march westwards in extreme winter conditions. The German

motive was to delay the prisoners' liberation by the advancing Red Army, and many would die as a result of this severe measure.

Having constructed his sledge, Clarke walked out into the cold. "Three of us decided to share this sledge and the camp was evacuated at one o'clock in the morning. It was the coldest winter in living memory, we had no clothing as such and we certainly had no food. We trudged for 36 hours to a huge barn. We queued outside for ages, and when you got in you sat with your legs all hunched because there was no room to spread out. You were on the stone floor, but those that didn't get inside got frostbite."

After sleeping in the barn, the prisoners walked to Spremberg in Germany. "The following morning we stood around for ages before we got moving, and it was bloody cold. We then trudged until we got to Spremberg. Eventually we were put into cattle trucks, where there was once again no room to spread out."

Conditions in the trucks were grim. "The doors were clamped down, there was no heating and not even straw to sleep on. The train didn't run at night and we were put into sidings. We were terrified that our own people would bomb us. We were on this truck for

about three days, and although we had a padre he was actually very selfish and moaned and groaned. We were then turfed out again, and we queued in the snow for about six hours while they searched us one by one."

Events turned from bad to worse when the prisoners were moved to a destroyed POW camp. "We hoped that we would have some shelter, but the camp we were sent to had been completely wrecked. The Navy had occupied it before they were turfed out. They thought they were being moved to make way for refugees from Hamburg so they wrecked it before they left. The beds had been burned and the windows were broken."

Clarke contracted dysentery while he was in the camp. "I was in agony for three days. Eventually someone saw us, although I doubt very much if he was a doctor. I queued to see him and I don't know what I expected him to do, but I passed out and collapsed. I made a mess of my trousers and I was so humiliated. I don't know how I cleaned myself up, but I wasn't the only one as so many people had it."

The conditions in the camp were degrading and heart-rending. "There was no fuel. At one point I was on my haunches picking up little bits of cinders and coke that had been





Clarke with Dame Judi Dench and Women's Auxiliary Air Force veteran Igraine Hamilton at the Bomber Command Memorial in London, 21 May 2013

## SURVIVING STALAG LUFT III



Clarke began a 100-day relay to celebrate the centenary of the RAF by passing a specially designated baton to one of the air force's youngest members, 1 April 2018

## LAST OF THE KRIEGIES

Charles Clarke's incredible story is featured in *Last Of The Kriegies*, which is published by Fighting High Publishing. For more information visit: [www.fighting-high-books.myshopify.com/products/last-of-the-kriegies](http://www.fighting-high-books.myshopify.com/products/last-of-the-kriegies)



dumped. I probably spent half a day picking up a tin-full so that we could light a fire. It was also the first time we could see aircraft being shot down. When we were in Stalag Luft III the shutters were always closed during an air raid. However, here you saw it, and we knew how many people were in the aircraft. For example, if three men got out of a Lancaster you knew there were four left, and it was terrible. The aircraft would just explode, and it was awful to watch."

The prisoners eventually resumed the march, and although the weather improved, the conditions remained arduous. "We were walking all the time and slept out in the open. When we stopped anywhere we put on our bits of clothing that said 'POW' in the hope that we wouldn't be attacked by our own people."

After crossing the Elbe River, the prisoners were "dumped" in the open on a farm, before they were discovered by chance by a British soldier. "A light reconnaissance vehicle from 21st Army Group came into the camp, and he wasn't in the advance guard but if he was he'd probably lost his way. He said that the main force would be with us the following day. At that time the German guards had disappeared and we swamped this guy!"

## "IF THREE MEN GOT OUT OF A LANCASTER YOU KNEW THERE WERE FOUR LEFT, AND IT WAS... AWFUL TO WATCH"

Clarke had survived the terrible ordeal, but many had not. Tens of thousands of Allied POWs were forced to march, but the true number of those who died was never accurately recorded. "We just kept going and were exhausted. How many people fell by the wayside? It was never known."

### A cinematic legacy

After being liberated, Clarke hitchhiked his way to Brussels with the men he had shared the sledge with before he flew home, ironically enough, on a Lancaster. Despite his imprisonment, he recalls that readjusting to freedom was not difficult. "What is remarkable is that we didn't need re-settling, we all came back and led normal lives. Post-traumatic stress didn't exist in those days, you just picked up and carried on, and I think it helped."

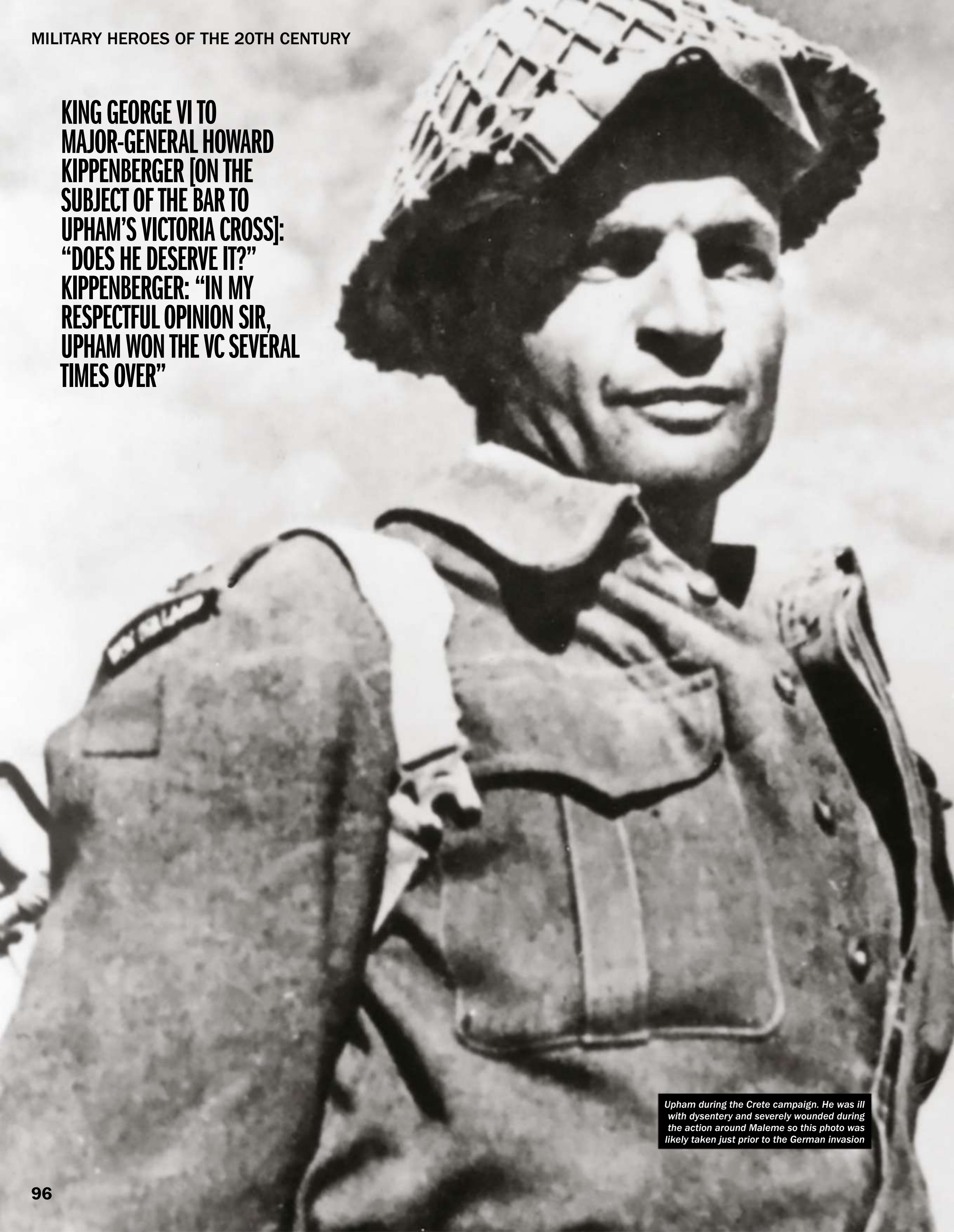
Nevertheless, he has mixed feelings towards his German captors. "We were treated harshly but not brutally. However, even that's not true when they had shot 50 of us! We honestly thought there was a possibility that we would be killed before the end of the war."

The experience of those who spent their captivity in Stalag Luft III may have been forgotten had it not been for the release of the 1963 Hollywood film *The Great Escape*. The film catapulted the events of March 1944 to legendary status, and it has become a potent symbol of Allied – and particularly British – ingenuity, pluck, resolve and bravery.

Although he is mindful of its inaccuracies, Clarke remains enthusiastic about the film. "Obviously, somebody like Steve McQueen didn't feature at all, and it didn't depict the hardship, fear or wonderment whether we'd be murdered afterwards, because you can't translate that. But as a film that depicted some idea of what the camp was like, I think it was brilliant. The theme song is so famous, but it never had words put to it, which is amazing really. Whatever you say about the film, who would remember the Great Escape without it? It has been wonderful in itself and is a tremendous tribute."



**KING GEORGE VI TO  
MAJOR-GENERAL HOWARD  
KIPPENBERGER [ON THE  
SUBJECT OF THE BAR TO  
UPHAM'S VICTORIA CROSS]:  
"DOES HE DESERVE IT?"  
KIPPENBERGER: "IN MY  
RESPECTFUL OPINION SIR,  
UPHAM WON THE VC SEVERAL  
TIMES OVER"**



*Upham during the Crete campaign. He was ill with dysentery and severely wounded during the action around Maleme so this photo was likely taken just prior to the German invasion*





# CHARLES HAZLITT UPHAM

## VICTORIA CROSS AND BAR

Maleme, Crete, May 1941, and Ruweisat Ridge, Egypt, July 1942, saw the heroic actions of a man who lived to receive an unprecedented Victoria Cross and Bar – the only combat soldier to achieve the honour

**YEARS ACTIVE:** 1939-1945  
**CONFLICTS:** WORLD WAR II  
**RANK:** CAPTAIN

WORDS MURRAY DAHM

**J**ust before his 31st birthday in September 1939, Charles Upham volunteered as a private in the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force. He had been in the territorials but refused to join at any higher rank. He was soon singled out for his qualities and made temporary lance corporal, but refused to attend the Officer Cadet Training Unit because he feared that such training would delay his departure for Europe. He was determined to learn everything he could and excelled in the use of the bayonet, machine gun and hand grenade. He once complained at the futility of having to miss bayonet practice in order to lay a lawn at camp headquarters. By the end of training his clear leadership abilities had been recognised and he had been made sergeant. Upham sailed with the first New Zealand troops for Egypt in December 1939.

In July 1940 Upham was finally persuaded to attend officer training (despite his known lack of respect for army conventions and rank, as well as a blunt and outspoken nature). There, he was insubordinate, questioned everything

and was immensely unpopular with his British training officers. He was critical of the tactics taught, especially against tanks and aircraft. Placed last in his course in November 1941 he was nonetheless commissioned as a second lieutenant and given command of a platoon in the 20th Battalion, made up of rugged and tough farm men like himself from the Canterbury and West Coast regions of New Zealand. With his platoon, he served with the New Zealand Division in Greece in March 1941 before being evacuated to Crete.

The 20th Battalion, along with the 28th (Maori) Battalion, was stationed at Maleme airfield in preparation for the German invasion. The New Zealanders, under the command of Lieutenant General Freyberg, had roughly a month to prepare their defences but possessed few resources other than manpower. Maleme, the keystone to the German airborne invasion, fell on 21 May. A counterattack was organised quickly, and at 4am Upham led a platoon of C Company to the village of Pirkos near the aerodrome and reported back that the Germans were “in ditches, behind hedges, in the top

and bottom storeys of village buildings, fields and gardens”. Unfortunately, the battalion counterattack was not pressed home and attention was instead shifted to taking the high ground overlooking the airfield.

Upham, despite being ill with dysentery, led his platoon forward 2,750 metres (3,000 yards) to the edge of the airfield, fighting all the way “unsupported and against a defence strongly organised in depth”. The platoon reached men from B Company and extracted them. “During this operation his platoon destroyed numerous enemy posts but on three occasions sections were temporarily held up”, it was reported. On the first occasion Upham himself went forward and “under heavy fire from a machine gun nest he advanced to close quarters with pistol and grenades”. When a second section was held up by two machine guns positioned in a house, Upham “went and placed a grenade through the window, destroying the crew of one machine gun and several others”. On the third occasion a section of his was held up, he “crawled within 15 yards [14 metres] of a machine gun post and killed the gunners with a grenade”.



Despite being described as a “walking skeleton” himself because of his dysentery, he carried a wounded man out and rallied troops to collect other wounded men. With a corporal, Upham then went forward 550 metres (600 yards) through enemy territory to bring in a company that had become isolated. He killed two enemies during this action and brought the company to the battalion’s new position. In all

climbed a steep hill to place his men in defence of the retreat. A unit of 50 Germans was spotted advancing and, climbing to the top of the hill with a Bren gunner and two men, the four succeeded to take out 22 of the enemy. Upham, exhausted, ill and severely wounded, was evacuated to Egypt that night. He had not eaten for the entire nine days save for condensed milk, which his men found for him.

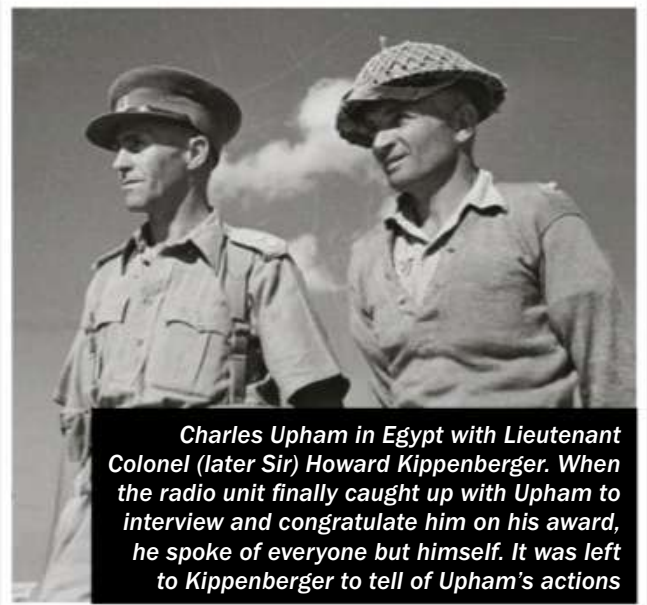
Desert on 14 June 1942. Upham had re-joined the division by this point, having suffered jaundice and pneumonia in the meantime. The division was assigned to Minqar Qaim. On 24 June the German 21st Panzer Division and 90th Light Division broke through the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade and surrounded the New Zealanders. Lieutenant General Freyberg had been wounded and command fell to Brigadier Inglis, who decided that they had to break out. The breakout was set for 28 June and, led by the Fourth Brigade, the New Zealanders drove through the lines of the 21st Panzer Division. During this action Upham, now a captain, commanded C Company and mounted grenade attacks on gun positions, tanks and transports.

Upham led, as always, from the front, and his attacks were carried out at such close quarters that his hands and face were lacerated by the shrapnel of his own grenades. He also ran out, exposing himself to fire, so that the Germans would give their positions away and could be taken down by the men of C Company. After the breakout, the Germans could not arrive at El Alamein for some days.

“FIVE ACTS OF CONSPICUOUS BRAVERY WERE ATTRIBUTED TO UPHAM IN THE EGYPTIAN DESERT AND WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH TO EARN TWO VICTORIA CROSSES”

this time Upham refused to go to the hospital, determined to stay on duty. On 23 May Upham held an exposed position overlooking the airfield until the battalion withdrew towards Canea at dawn. Upham was wounded at the Platanias bridge, but after he had his wound dressed insisted he return to battle. On 25 May the 20th Battalion was part of the counterattack at Galatas to allow time for more units to withdraw to Canea. Upham was heavily involved in this action, being wounded in the leg. Still he led his men, killing 40 Germans with rifle and grenade. When ordered to retire, he left his platoon under the command of a sergeant and personally went to inform others to fall back. Watched by his men, he was fired on by two Germans, played dead and then “crawled into a position and having the use of only one arm he rested his rifle in the fork of a tree and as the Germans came forward he killed them both. The second to fall actually hit the muzzle of the rifle as he fell.” The decision was taken to retreat to Sphakia on the south coast of Crete, a 65-kilometre (40-mile) trek over mountainous terrain. Despite his illness and injuries, Upham made the trek and then, on 30 May with his platoon,

As the quotes from his Victoria Cross citation show, he was awarded the highest honour for a series of heroic actions spanning nine days. Upham recuperated in Egypt, learning of his award in October 1941. His commander, Lieutenant Colonel Howard Kippenberger, spoke of Upham’s distress at being singled out for recognition, but also that every man in the battalion agreed that he was thoroughly deserving. Upham was convinced to accept the medal in recognition for all the brave actions of the men around him. Interviewed for New Zealand radio, Upham took no credit for his own actions but thanked his commanders as well as the NCOs and men in his platoon, battalion and division, stating, “It is very easy to do any job under those circumstances.” He even went so far as to name all the men in his company who had been left in Greece and Crete as prisoners or casualties, asking the New Zealand public to send them care packages. Other than his bravery, it was Upham’s care for his men’s wellbeing that most endeared them to him. After evacuation from Crete, the New Zealand Division served on garrison duty in northern Syria until summoned to the Western



Charles Upham in Egypt with Lieutenant Colonel (later Sir) Howard Kippenberger. When the radio unit finally caught up with Upham to interview and congratulate him on his award, he spoke of everyone but himself. It was left to Kippenberger to tell of Upham’s actions



Upham (right with a spoon in his mouth) was considered the typical New Zealand soldier: rugged, resourceful and resilient. One of his hallmarks was his complete modesty – he was genuinely distressed at being singled out for his acts of bravery



Upham’s numerous acts of bravery were worthy of several Victoria Crosses, but he remained modest about his contribution





*The invasion of Crete was the first airborne invasion in history. Upham and his platoon were an essential part of the counterattack launched on 22 May and the delaying action until 30 May to allow evacuation*

There, the New Zealand Fourth and Fifth Brigades were placed to attack Ruweisat Ridge, some 60 metres (200 feet) high, 23 kilometres (14 miles) south of El Alamein.

The attack on 14 July did not go to plan, with the New Zealanders coming into contact with the enemy much earlier than expected and well short of the ridge itself. The commander of the Fourth Brigade needed a clear picture of what was going on and asked 20th Battalion to send someone forward. The commander of 20th Battalion detailed that task to Captain Upham's C Company. Rather than assigning anyone else, Upham went forward in a jeep himself and soon came under fire. He criss-crossed the battlefield and reported back to the commander of the brigade that the main German positions were on the flat in front of the ridge rather than the ridge itself. There was no choice but to press the attack.

Upham's company was then ordered to distract a force of German infantry, armoured cars and tanks that had taken up position in a depression. The citation for his Bar stated that Upham "without hesitation at once led his company in a determined attack on the two nearest strong points on the left of the sector. His voice could be heard above the din of the battle cheering his men." Upham even had his elbow shattered by an enemy bullet

but continued to lead the frontal attack, which swept everything before it. The ridge was taken, but the New Zealand forces were exposed to artillery and machine gun fire and were left without tank support. Upham had just made his way back to C Company when a mortar shell exploded and killed most of the company and left Upham badly wounded in the leg. The German counterattack, led by heavy tanks, overwhelmed the New Zealanders, who had only a few anti-tank guns. Upham was found near the six surviving members of his company and they were taken into captivity.

A bedridden Upham was a terrible prisoner for his Italian captors, but even worse as his injuries healed. When he had recovered, Upham attempted to escape from his POW camp, which led to him being sent to Germany in September 1943. He again attempted to escape and was interred at Colditz Castle – the place for habitual escapees – in October 1944. One of his fellow Colditz captives described Upham the prisoner in terms that sum him up in all things: "Determination and singleness of purpose personified – loyal, constructive, quiet, unassuming and friendly." It's unsurprising that his nickname was 'Pug'.

Almost as soon as he was captured in Egypt, Kippenberger had begun to gather the evidence to support a Bar to Upham's VC. It

was considered so unlikely that a Bar would be awarded that the question was put off until his release at the end of the war. Five acts of conspicuous bravery were attributed to Upham in the Egyptian desert and would have been enough to earn two Victoria Crosses.

Upham was released from Colditz on 15 April 1945 and awarded his Victoria Cross on 11 May by King George VI. Upham himself was unaware that there was a movement, led by General Bernard Freyberg, the commander of the New Zealand Division, to award him a Bar. When the evidence was gathered, however, it was clear he deserved it. His commander, Kippenberger, told King George in person that he thought Upham had earned the VC several times over. By the time the Bar was granted, Upham was back in Christchurch, New Zealand. His response when it was announced was typical: "Hundreds of others have done more than I did." Upham maintained that he had only done his duty.

At the conclusion of the war, Upham returned to Canterbury. He shunned the spotlight and turned down a knighthood. He founded a farm despite the ongoing difficulties with his injuries. There he maintained his modest life with his wife Molly and three daughters although, legend has it, he never allowed a piece of German machinery onto his property.



# THE FORGOTTEN MANY

The 'Few' may have won the Battle of Britain, but they were just the tip of a vast machine. Hundreds of thousands of personnel on the ground made their every move possible

WORDS STUART HADAWAY

**F**irst, let us get one thing straight: the Royal Air Force won the Battle of Britain. It is true that many other organisations played their part, and would have played a larger one should the Germans have ever attempted to invade. But that invasion never came because the principal precondition established by the Germans themselves – air superiority over the English Channel and southern UK – was never met. The RAF, and primarily Fighter Command, made sure of this.

However, while pilots confronted and defeated the enemy in the air, their continuing efforts were only made possible by an extensive and complex ground organisation that had been carefully built up since the very earliest days of the RAF's existence.

This organisation fed, equipped and cared for the pilots on the ground and directed their efforts in the air, while also keeping their aircraft in flying condition and providing the fuel, ammunition and spare parts they needed to get off the ground.

Flying Officer (later Air Commodore) Al Deere of No. 74 Squadron recalled, "On-the-spot repairs of damaged aircraft were carried out by our own ground crews, who were magnificent. All night long, lights burned in the shuttered hangars as the fitters, electricians, armourers and riggers worked unceasingly to put the maximum number on the line for the next day's operations. All day too they worked, not even ceasing when the airfield was threatened with attack. A grand body of men about whom too little has been written but without whose efforts victory would not have been possible."

Growing from some 230,000 personnel in June 1940 to over 350,000 by the end of the Battle of Britain, these men and women are the 'Forgotten Many'.

## Foundations of an air force

Through the 1920s, the RAF was struggling to survive in an age of stringent financial restrictions. Despite the many calls on the RAF and Air Ministry's purse, the chief of the Air Staff, Sir Hugh Trenchard, resolutely implemented his plans to invest in the future. He established technical schools and apprentice schemes to ensure the long-term flow of adequate numbers of well-trained and educated young men into his noncommissioned ranks – a novel idea, unheard of in either of the other services. In fact, the apprentice schemes were actually quite revolutionary across the whole of society. Apprentices (or at least their

*Right: Pilots engage Messerschmitt 109s over southern England. They were kept in the fight by a vast support network, which brought them to the right place in the sky, kept the pilots fed and ready, and repaired damaged planes and airfields*

*Left: An RAF apprentice works on an aircraft's engine. The highly skilled teams on the ground played a vital role in the Battle of Britain*





**“ON-THE-SPOT REPAIRS OF  
DAMAGED AIRCRAFT WERE CARRIED  
OUT BY OUR OWN GROUND CREWS,  
WHO WERE MAGNIFICENT”**

**– Flying Officer Al Deere,  
No. 74 Squadron**





families) usually had to pay their employers, reimbursing them for taking the time and effort to train their students in the mysteries of their trade. However, the members of the Aircraft Apprentices Scheme at No. 1 School of Technical Training, based at RAF Halton, not only received first-class tutoring in a range of engineering and technical trades, they also received pay. Particularly for working class applicants, this made the apprentice scheme a unique opportunity to secure their future, and competition for the 1,000 or so places each year was intense. It made the scheme expensive, but through it Trenchard was laying solid foundations and ensuring the quality of his rank and file for decades to come.

Apprentices could join between the ages of 15 and 17-and-a-half and trained for three years. In the late 1930s, as the RAF expanded, the apprentice scheme was supplemented by a Boy Entrants scheme, where applicants who did not quite reach apprentice entry-level were entered into a slightly lower-level 12-18 month course.

Anyone over the age of 17-and-a-half could join as a man, attending two months of basic training at the RAF Depot at RAF Uxbridge before going for a range of specialist training. No. 3 School of Technical Training at RAF Manston, for example,

could turn a man into a blacksmith in a year, a fabrication worker in six months, or either a motor transport driver or an aero-engine fitter in four months. At the Electrical and Wireless School at RAF Cranwell, meanwhile, courses ranged between six months and two years on a variety of specialist subjects.

Whether you were a former apprentice (known colloquially as ‘Halton Brats’) or joined through another route, graduation from these training courses was just the start. Personnel would have to undertake regular further training courses (some as ‘placements’ with manufacturers), and promotions depended on passing ‘Trade Tests’ to prove competence in your chosen area. Particularly for Brats, by the time they reached the ranks of noncommissioned officers, the technical levels of education achieved were not far short of the equivalent of university courses.

Officers faced a different course. Some specialisms existed – engineering officers, for example, went through extensive technical training at the Home Aircraft Depot at Henlow. But the vast majority of officers joined as ‘general duties’, and in the 1930s this required them to qualify as pilots (although of course not all pilots were officers; about a quarter were

**“THIS ATTRACTED ADVENTUROUS YOUNG MEN WHO WERE CAPTIVATED BY THE EXCITEMENT AND ADVENTURE OF FLYING, BUT WHO DID NOT WANT TO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO A FULL CAREER”**



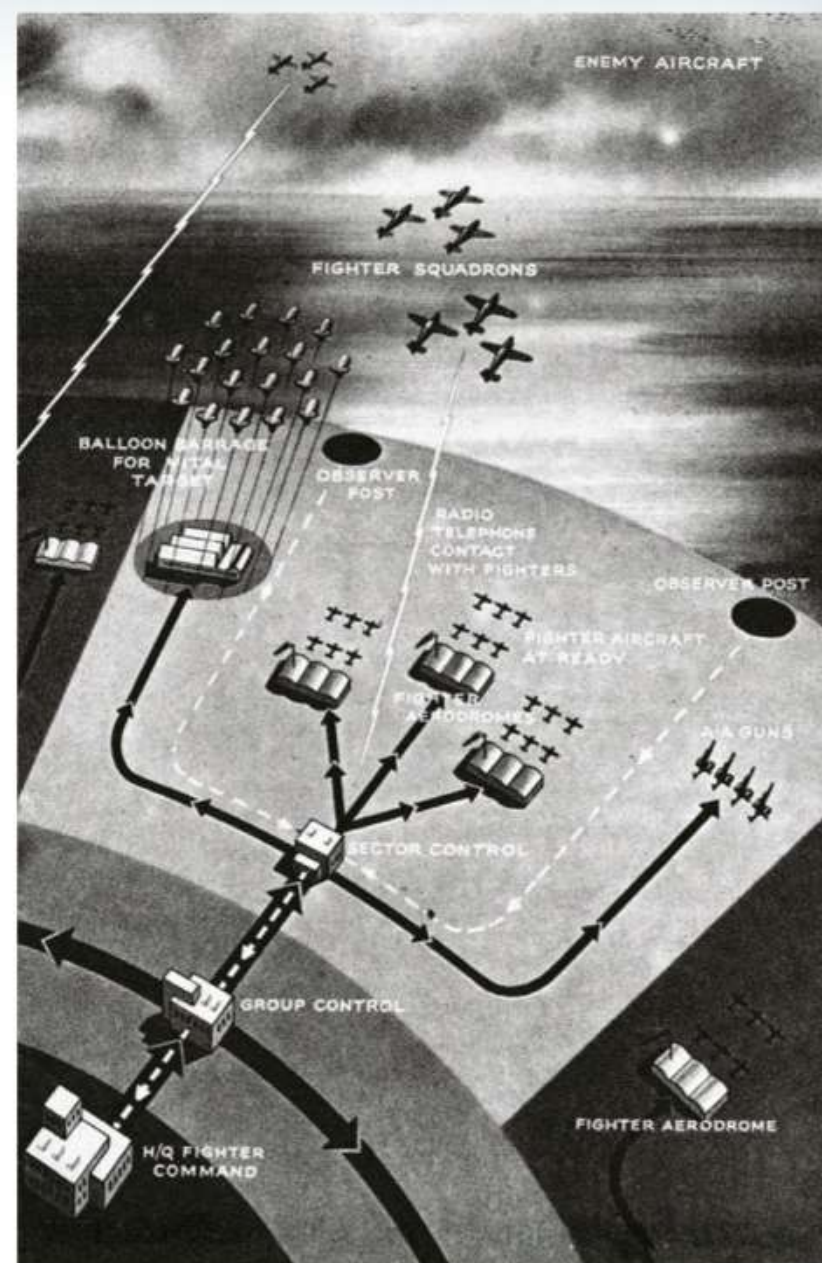
Two members of the ground crew chat with Squadron Leader Peter Townsend DSO DFC on their Hawker Hurricane at RAF Wick







Right: An illustration from a pamphlet produced by the Air Ministry in 1941, showing the air defence network, known as the 'Dowding system' – although the significant role of radar was omitted, as it was still considered a secret



RAF trainee technical staff going through a small part of their extensive – and never-ending – training

## “IT WAS ALSO A FALLACY ALL ALONG TO THINK THAT THE RAF COULD BE THUS BOMBED INTO SUBMISSION”

sergeants). However, officers were always in short supply, so in the mid-1930s the Short Service Commission system was introduced, where men could join for a four-year term, extended to six years in 1939. This attracted adventurous young men who were captivated by the excitement and adventure of flying, but who did not want to commit themselves to a full career in the RAF. They would spend about a year in flying training, before joining a frontline squadron, where their training would continue.

By 1939, about four per cent of RAF officers were on these short-term enlistments. Due to the nature of their commissions and the career structure of the service, it meant that the vast majority of pilots on flying squadrons were Short Service Commission men. By 1940 the mobilisation of the Auxiliary Air Force and RAF Volunteer Reserve had further diluted the number of career officers in squadrons.

These factors meant that in the average squadron during the Battle of Britain, the ground crews were overwhelmingly career professionals, with longer service and more advanced training than the aircrew they supported.

### Fighting the Battle of Britain

On 16 July 1940, Adolf Hitler issued Führer Directive No. 16, calling for the destruction of the RAF in preparation for an invasion of Britain. With little progress having been made over the next two weeks, on 1 August

he issued Directive No. 17, calling for the Luftwaffe to overwhelm the RAF in the shortest possible time, with an absolute deadline of 15 September. After further preparation, during which small-scale attacks were made on coastal targets, and following delays due to bad weather, 13 August was announced as *Aldertag* ('Eagle Day') – the first day of *Unternehmen Adlerangriff* ('Operation Eagle Attack'), the campaign to destroy the RAF.

This first mass blow of the Luftwaffe against the RAF was a failure. Although heavy raids were launched against airfields and radar sites, poor intelligence meant that large parts of the attack were wasted on Coastal and Bomber Command airfields, rather than concentrating on the vital fighter airfields. It was also a fallacy all along to think that the RAF could be bombed into submission. Fighter Command's airfields were almost entirely grass fields, and an extraordinary number of bombs need to be dropped evenly across them to leave no space at all for fighters to land. While airfield buildings could be destroyed, improvisation and an excellent logistics system meant that equipment and material could be quickly replaced, and only once was a Fighter Command station closed for more than a few hours due to enemy action during the battle.

Fighter Command's command and control system was extensive and dispersed over a wide area. Radar stations were hard to



# WAAFs AT WAR

THE WOMEN'S AUXILIARY AIR FORCE (WAAF) FORMED IN 1939. DURING THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN IT PROVED TO BE A VITAL PART OF THE RAF

The Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF) had existed from 1918-1920 before falling foul of defence cuts. In 1939 a new WAAF was formed from RAF companies of the Auxiliary Territorial Service. Although they carried out traditional 'women's' domestic and clerical work, they also staffed operations rooms, radar sites and barrage balloon units.

The Battle of Britain showed the WAAF to be a highly valuable resource, and soon women were also engaged in technical and engineering trades (as the WRAF had been), working on aircraft and heavy equipment.

Although Corporal Daphne Pearson had already won the George Cross in May 1940 for rescuing crew members from a burning bomber, the Battle of Britain would give the WAAF a chance to prove their courage under fire en masse. During the Battle of Britain six WAAFs would be awarded Military Medals, three of them at RAF Biggin Hill.

On 18 August 1940, Sergeant Elizabeth Mortimer stayed at her post in the station armoury during an air raid, manning a telephone switchboard that was vital for co-ordinating the defence of the station. Despite being ordered to take cover, she sat through the air raid, and then

joined teams planting red flags by unexploded bombs, so that landing pilots could avoid them.

On 30 August the station was attacked again and two air raid shelters were hit by bombs. In one, 39 ground staff were killed, while in the other one WAAF was killed and many more were buried alive for several hours until rescued. On 31 August yet another raid hit Biggin Hill and two WAAFs, Sergeant Helen Turner (ex-WRAF) and Corporal Elspeth Henderson, both ignored orders to take shelter and remained at their posts in the operations room. As bombs fell around them, they kept the crucial lines of communication open.

**"DESPITE BEING ORDERED TO TAKE COVER, SHE SAT THROUGH THE AIR RAID, AND THEN JOINED TEAMS PLANTING RED FLAGS NEXT TO UNEXPLODED BOMBS"**



WAAFs Joan E Mortimer, Elspeth C Henderson and Helen E Turner, who all received the Military Medal for their actions under fire at RAF Biggin Hill



*Some of 'The Few', none of whom would have been able to take off without the efforts of 'The Many'*



destroy, due to the resilient structure of the radar masts – blast waves mostly went straight through them – and the small size of the huts where the operators and equipment sat. The vital filter rooms and different level operations rooms, which sifted and made sense of incoming information and directed aircraft accordingly, were also small, dispersed and sometimes underground.

Likewise the logistics network that repaired aircraft, replaced expendables (such as fuel, ammunition, oxygen and spare parts) and provided new aircraft was also massive and widely spread out. RAF Maintenance Command consisted of four groups, plus some ancillary units. No. 40 Group had some 23 depots amounting to 790,000 square metres (8.5 million square feet) to contain and issue equipment of all types, from trucks to button sticks. No. 41 Group had 11 storage depots holding and issuing spare aircraft, the flow of which greatly increased as British aircraft production tripled in the first half of 1940.

Supporting them was the Air Transport Auxiliary, a civilian organisation that flew aircraft from factory to depot, and then from depot to frontline station. In June 1940 it had about 100 pilots who were in some way ineligible for RAF service; some were foreign, some were over-age, and one-fifth were women. By the end of the battle, its strength had grown to 250 pilots and 350 aircrew and support staff, who freed up RAF pilots to join frontline units.

No. 42 Group was responsible for the storage, movement and issue of munitions, oxygen and fuel, all of which were crucial to keep aircraft flying and fighting. It had 95

## **“WRECK RECOVERY HAD TO BE CONTRACTED OUT TO ANY CIVILIAN ORGANISATION WITH SUITABLE VEHICLES, INCLUDING DELIVERY AND REMOVALS FIRMS LIKE PICKFORDS”**

fuel depots and five munitions dumps spread around the country, and the handling and transportation of all of these commodities was dangerous and skilled work.

No. 43 Group dealt with repair and salvage. Supported by the Civilian Repair Organisation, the 35 units of the group were spread around the country to provide the men and equipment for the repair of aircraft that were too damaged to be patched up by their own ground crews. They also oversaw the collection of wrecked aircraft. Crashed RAF aircraft were of course prioritised – not only would wrecked British aircraft littering the countryside be bad for public morale, but they could also be stripped for parts that could be refurbished and reused, and the rest of the materials sent for recycling.

Downed German aircraft would be assessed for intelligence value. During the battle, the demand for salvage crews outstripped the RAF's resources, so much so that wreck recovery had to be contracted out any to civilian organisation with suitable vehicles, including delivery and removals firms like Pickfords.

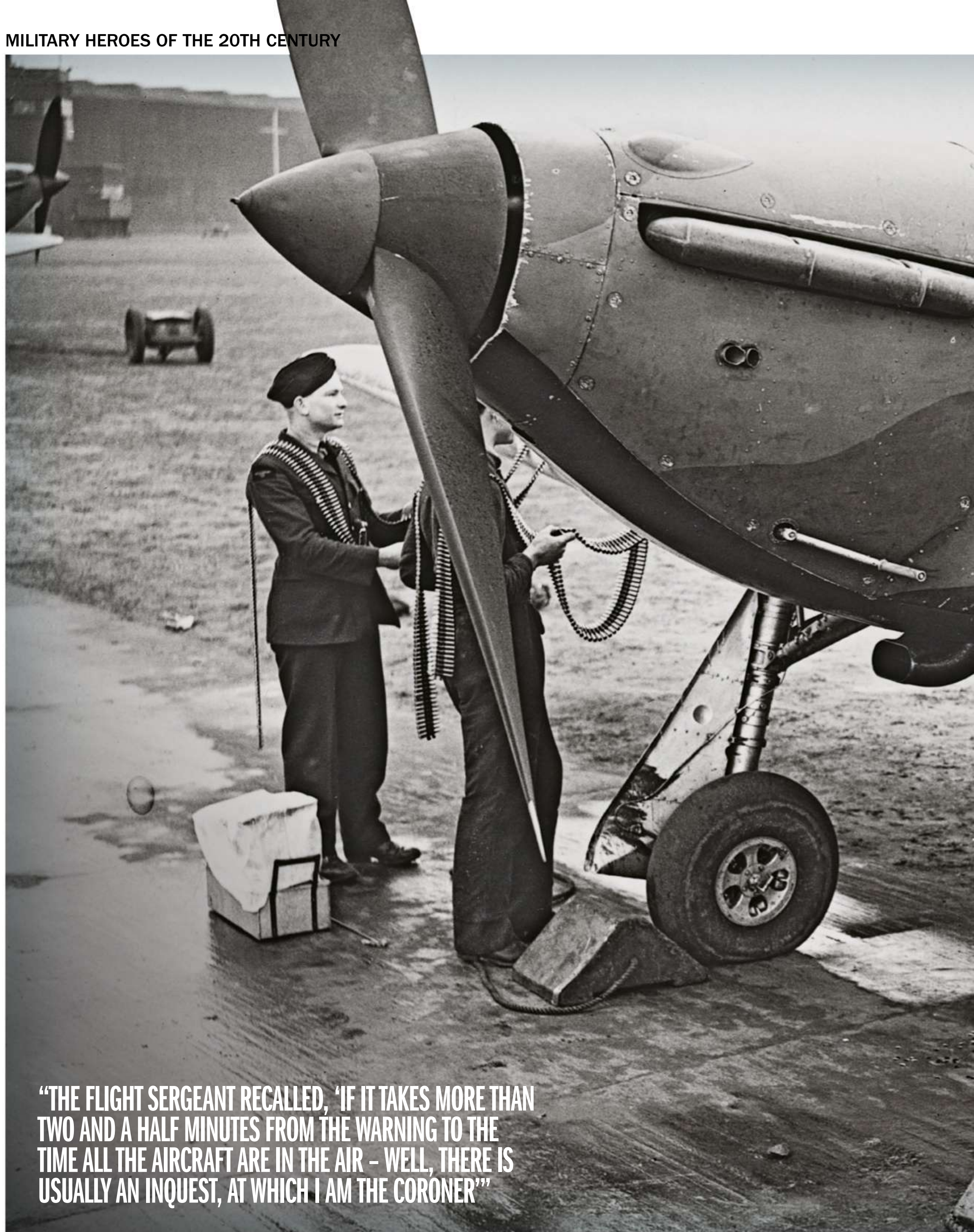
## **Into action**

In the summer of 1940, the day started well before dawn for fighter station ground staff. They could be hauling themselves out of bed as early as between 3am-4am, dressing and going to the canteen for breakfast. Then they would prepare their station or squadron for action.

The personnel dedicated to caring for aircraft would set about preparing 'their' aircraft. Each fighter had a dedicated two-man ground crew – a rigger and a fitter. A flight sergeant with No. 249 Squadron recalled that, “Each aircraft had its own crew. As a result everybody is very proud of the fighter in his charge. And a healthy rivalry develops, too. They are like the boys in racing stables who groom their own particular horse, call it pet names, slap it affectionately and kiss it when it wins a race... Once a pilot came back from a battle after shooting down a Junkers 88 and two Messerschmitts. The crew that serviced that Hurricane did a war dance and went about swanking to the other crews. They regarded the three at one crack as THEIR work.”

Crews would remove canopy and wing covers, then start the engine to warm it up, before conducting basic checks. Specialists who cared for particular parts of several aircraft – armourers, instrument fitters and wireless mechanics among others – would also do their rounds. Starter motors would be plugged in to make sure the aircraft could be instantly started and running by the time a scrambling pilot arrived. The same flight sergeant recalled, “If it takes more than two-and-a-half minutes from the warning to the time all the aircraft are in the air – well, there is usually an inquest, at which I am the coroner.”





**“THE FLIGHT SERGEANT RECALLED, ‘IF IT TAKES MORE THAN TWO AND A HALF MINUTES FROM THE WARNING TO THE TIME ALL THE AIRCRAFT ARE IN THE AIR – WELL, THERE IS USUALLY AN INQUEST, AT WHICH I AM THE CORONER’”**



*Armourers reload a Hawker Hurricane with belts of ammunition. Spitfires could be re-armed with pre-loaded magazines, which was faster, but some had to be fed in from below*





# CASUALTIES

## 13 AUGUST 1940 'ADLER TAG'

Fighter Command aircrew	15	2
Bomber Command aircrew	52	9
Coastal Command aircrew	0	0
Training Command aircrew	0	3
All Commands ground crew	96	3

## 16 AUGUST 1940

Fighter Command aircrew	22	2
Bomber Command aircrew	16	0
Coastal Command aircrew	1	0
Training Command aircrew	0	2
All Commands ground crew	43	3

## 18 AUGUST 1940 'THE HARDEST DAY'

Fighter Command aircrew	28	2
Bomber Command aircrew	2	7
Coastal Command aircrew	0	0
Training Command aircrew	1	1
All Commands ground crew	37	1



After a long, tense wait, their aircraft would hopefully return, when more minutes of frantic activity followed, even if it was not damaged. The anonymous flight sergeant also said, “As soon as the first one lands it taxis towards the waiting ground crew. A tanker goes alongside to fill up the petrol tanks. At the same time the armourers re-arm the eight Browning guns. The rigger changes the oxygen bottles and fits the starting-motor to the aircraft so that it is ready for the next take-off. Then the rigger takes some strips of fabric which he has brought with him from the crew-room and places them over the gun holes. It helps keep the guns clean and also helps to keep the aircraft 100 per cent efficient in the air until the guns are fired.

“Meanwhile, another member of the crew searches the aircraft for bullet holes, and the electrician goes over the wiring and the wireless mechanic tests the radio set. Every little part of the aircraft is OK before the machine is pronounced serviceable again. All this process should take no more than five minutes, but we allow seven minutes for the whole job... Once we serviced a squadron which came back more or less together in eight and a half minutes.

“If a Hurricane comes down with a few bullet holes, it is my job to see if the injuries are superficial or not. If there are holes through the fabric, we quickly patch them up. If there is a bullet thought the main spar, then it is a case of a new wing.”

In between these periods of intense activity, while the pilots waited for the call to scramble or tried to unwind after landing, the ground crews would still be busy. Work would be carried out to make grounded aircraft airworthy

**“THE LOUDSPEAKER... APPEALED, TAKE COVER! TAKE COVER!’ WITHIN THREE MINUTES OF THAT WARNING I SAW THE FIRST OF THE JUNKERS COMING STRAIGHT DOWN ON THE ‘DROME IN A VERTICAL DIVE”**

again, routine maintenance would be done on the aircraft that were not flying (even on the busiest of days it was unlikely the whole squadron would fly at once), bomb craters could be filled in, and preparations made for the next scramble. In quiet moments a cup of tea and a sandwich (‘char and a wad’) might be grabbed from the canteen or a NAAFI van.

While the ground crews worked on the aircraft, the other ground staff at the station would carry on their routine tasks to keep the airfield running. Cooks, cleaners and maintenance staff would go about their daily routines. Clerks would sort, complete and send off the paperwork that would keep crucial supplies and replacement parts flowing in. Days over that summer would be long, exhausting marathons until the sun slipped beneath the horizon. The flight sergeant recalled, “Finally, at nightfall, we make the daily inspection. The armourers clean the guns, the fitter checks the engine over, the rigger checks round the fuselage and cleans it, and the wireless man checks the radio set. The instruments man

checks the instruments. When everything is OK and the necessary papers signed, then the machine can be put to bed. The sleeves are put on the wings, the cover is put over the cockpit, the pickets are pegged into the ground and the machine left, heading into the wind, until dawn... During the summer-time our hours are from about 3.30am until 10.30pm.”

Between 13 August-6 September 1940, the ground installations of the RAF were the Luftwaffe’s main target. During this period, and to a lesser extent even afterwards, the ground crews at sites in southern England often had to work under air attack, and sporadic attacks were made on stations further north too.

On many of these days the ground crews suffered higher casualties than the aircrews, and some stations were badly damaged. On 16 August, RAF Tangmere was targeted: LAC Maurice Haffenden, an engine fitter with No. 43 Squadron, recalled, “At 1pm the loudspeaker, with a greater urgency than before, suddenly appealed, ‘Take cover! Take cover!’ Within three minutes of that warning I saw the first of the Junkers coming straight down on the ‘drome in a vertical dive. The leader was within 2,000 feet (610 metres) of the ground – long wing span – fixed undercarriage – single engine – and then w-h-e-e-z... I went head-first down a manhole as the first bomb landed on the cookhouse. For seven minutes their 1,000-pounders were scoring direct hits and everything was swept away by machine gun bullets. I never believed such desolation and destruction to be possible. Everything is wrecked – the hangars, the stores, the hospital, the armoury, the cookhouses, the canteen – well, everything.”





*The magnificent Battle of Britain Memorial on the Embankment in London, which acknowledges the large support network behind the pilots*

Squadron Leader Sandy Johnstone of No. 602 Squadron, based at nearby RAF Westhampnett, visited Tangmere that evening and “found the place in utter shambles, with wisps of smoke still rising from the shattered buildings. Little knots of people were wandering about with dazed looks on their faces, obviously deeply affected by the events of the day. I eventually tracked down the station commander standing on the lawn in front of the officer’s mess with a parrot sitting on his shoulder. Jack was covered with grime and the wretched bird was screeching its imitation of a Stuka at the height of the attack! The once-immaculate grass was littered with personal belongings which had been blasted from the wing which had received a direct hit. Shirts, towels, socks and a portable gramophone – a little private world for all to see... Rubble was everywhere and all three hangars had been wrecked.”

A total of 19 ground staff were killed at Tangmere, but despite the damage the station remained operational. Only RAF Manston would be closed for any extended period of time, after repeated heavy raids. The story of what has become known as the ‘Manston Mutiny’ was recounted by Len Deighton in his 1977 book *Fighter*, where it is said members of the ground staff refused to leave shelters and had to be forced out at gunpoint. There is no evidence for this at all. Deighton has always refused to reveal his source, and no other evidence has ever come to light.

### ‘Spirit of Dunkirk’

In fact, morale held up incredibly well in most areas. It is tempting to look back on the



*Apprentices at RAF Halton, 1939. These men would be vital to the following year’s victory in the Battle of Britain*

## “THE DEEP, SNARLING ROAR OF THE BOMBERS AND THE PROTECTING FIGHTERS GREW CLOSER AND CLOSER TILL THE WHOLE HUT VIBRATED”

‘Spirit of Dunkirk’, or later the ‘Blitz Spirit’ with scepticism, wondering how much is a myth based on propaganda. But there is plenty of evidence of the nation pulling together.

An anonymous WAAF at Rye Radar Station witnessed this stoicism when her site was bombed on 13 August: “The deep, snarling roar of the bombers and the protecting fighters grew closer and closer till the whole hut vibrated with it. The Watch continued steadily giving height and speed and direction of attacking hostile aircraft to Fighter Command without a tremor in their voices. Suddenly the RAF Officer-in-Charge called; “They’re diving! Get down!” and only then did those airwomen move, and they moved as if you’d pressed a button! We all fell flat on the floor as the first stick of bombs burst... Everything loose shot off the tables, shutters were blown in, and glass flew in every direction. The floor and hut shuddered, and chairs and tables overturned on to us. Through clouds of dust I saw legs and arms protruding from underneath the debris; to those in reach I gave a friendly pat and an assurance that they were all right and must remain still... At last, after what seemed like hours, we dared to raise our heads... What a scene of wreckage and devastation it was!

## GROUND STAFF

NOT ALL STATION PERSONNEL WORKED DIRECTLY ON KEEPING THE AIRCRAFT FLYING, BUT THEY ALL PLAYED THEIR PART IN KEEPING THE FIGHTER PILOTS FIGHTING

### PARACHUTE PACKERS

Male and female packers maintained and carefully packed the parachutes that could save a crew member’s life. One slight slip in packing or a missed minor fault could have disastrous results.

### BATMEN

Batmen looked after the officers in their quarters, waking them and bringing their morning tea, taking care of their laundry, and other domestic chores – small matters, but they eased the otherwise stress-filled life of a pilot.

### COOKS

Never underestimate the physical and mental boost that comes from a hot meal or cup of tea. For air and ground crews working intense, 18-hour days, a constant stream of sustenance was vital.

### FIREMEN

A fireman’s job was a dangerous one, whether putting out fires in bombed buildings or trying to rescue crews from crashed and burning aircraft. In either case, unexploded bombs or ammunition could ‘cook off’ at any second.

## WIRELESS & TELEPHONE OPERATORS

Fast and efficient communications were the cornerstone of the RAF’s success. Whether directing pilots in the air or calling a depot for crucial parts and materials, they were critical to keeping the system functional.



*The interior of a radar station, part of the network spread along the UK’s south and east coasts*



Armourers re-arming a Supermarine Spitfire at RAF Hawkinge, July 1940. Some of the Spitfire's guns had to be loaded from below, an awkward operation

**"THE NOISE FROM THE EXPLOSIONS GOING ON AROUND US WAS TERRIFYING, BUT NOT ONE OF THOSE MAGNIFICENT MEN FALTERED FOR A MOMENT IN THEIR TASKS"**



"The Station buildings were all wrecked... and there were enormous craters all over the place. But... we were back on the air in 20 minutes," she recounted.

Sergeant Iain Hutchinson was a pilot with No. 54 Squadron at RAF Hornchurch, and witnessed another example of the strong team spirit: "The airfield was under attack and chunks of shrapnel were raining down on the airfield. When I taxied towards the dispersal no one was to be seen; they were all in the air-raid shelters taking cover. Before I rolled to a halt and cut the engine, 'B' Flight ground crew, under their flight sergeant, were swarming around my Spitfire; the bowser was racing out to refuel the aircraft, while the armament men, laden with ammunition, were reloading the guns. The noise from the explosions going on around us was terrifying, but not one of those magnificent men faltered for a moment in their tasks. I was frankly relieved to be taking off again."

Of course, there were limits though. Jack Shenfield, a mechanic with the same squadron at RAF Hornchurch, also witnessed a more pragmatic approach in action: "I got into the shelter, we were all packed in there, and the sergeant had closed the door. We had been only in there a minute or so when there was a banging at the door. He opened the door and it was the driver of the bowser; this was the vehicle that carried all the high-octane petrol for the aircraft. He'd parked the thing outside the shelter with all the bombs falling all around. The sergeant said, 'Sod off, and take that bloody thing with you, and park it somewhere else before you blow us all to pieces.' The driver had to go back and park it before they'd let him into the shelter."

Such human lapses aside, the efforts of the RAF's ground crew and ground staff during the Battle of Britain formed an incredibly strong foundation on which the aircrews could operate.

Especially during the period between 13 August-7 September, the RAF's infrastructure and ground personnel were the main target of the Germans, although of course raids were made on airfields and radar sites before that, and would continue to be made (albeit on a smaller scale) afterwards. In fact, in some ways the raids became more dangerous, as large, easily spotted and tracked formations of bombers gave way to individual aircraft or small formations that arrived at low level and high speed. Little or no warning could be made for these raiders, and personnel were regularly caught out in the open without a chance to

reach shelter. For example, ATA pilot Lettice Curtis would recall being caught in the open as she walked across Hatfield Airfield, near the de Havilland factory, on 3 October 1940: "As so often happened, the air raid warning and the bombs came at the same instant and one bomb fell very near indeed to those running from the office to the shelters. Luckily for them it did not explode on impact, otherwise we would almost certainly have lost, amongst others, Pauline Gower, our Commanding Officer, who was nearest to the bomb at the time.

One of the bombs, however, did land on a factory workshop and 21 people were killed and some 70 were injured. The bombs had been dropped from around 100 feet (30 metres) and the pilot had machine-gunned the workers running to the shelters."

That aircraft, a Ju-88a of 1/KG77, dropped four bombs, one of which failed to explode, but the element of surprise allowed it to achieve a disproportionate effect (even if it was almost immediately shot down and the crew captured).

Although the direct attacks on stations decreased, the Battle of Britain would still rage for two more long, exhausting months before the Germans switched to night attacks. Though the danger decreased somewhat, the long hours and gruelling pace of work did not. The outnumbered fighter pilots who would climb repeatedly into their aircraft to take to the skies and defend the nation could do so with the knowledge that they were the sharp point of a vast, well-trained and efficient machine intended to put them in the right place at the right time, and with their aircraft in the best possible condition to fight.

## GPO

**THE GENERAL POST OFFICE WAS ANOTHER PART IN THE INTRICATE SYSTEM**

The General Post Office (GPO) owned the telephone lines, exchanges and other equipment that were crucial to binding together the RAF's command and control system, as well as its day-to-day activities. Its staff carried out vital maintenance and repair work, often while the stations and radar sites they were supporting were under attack. Without their efforts, RAF Fighter Command would have lost its key edge: the ability to gather and disseminate information, and then direct its aircraft to enemy formations.



# DISCOVER THE STORY OF THE PEOPLE, PLANES AND MISSIONS OF THE RAF

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A man of extraordinary  
courage: Captain Witold  
Pilecki (1901-1948)

**“ONE PRISONER WAS ASKED BY THE  
SS TO RUN TO A POST BY THE SIDE OF  
THE ROAD, ONLY TO BE SHOT DOWN.  
TEN MEN WERE THEN DRAGGED OUT  
AND SHOT AT RANDOM AS ‘COLLECTIVE  
RESPONSIBILITY’ FOR THE ‘ESCAPE’”**



# INFILTRATING AUSCHWITZ

WORDS MARIANNA BUKOWSKI

On the morning of 19 September 1940, Witold Pilecki did what most would find unthinkable – he deliberately walked straight into a German street roundup, with the aim of being arrested and sent to Auschwitz

**A**s a man of exceptional courage, Captain Witold Pilecki stands near-peerless in the pantheon of wartime heroes, and his mission in Auschwitz was just one of many extraordinarily brave acts of his life.

He was born on 13 May 1901 in Olonets, northern Russia. His family had suffered the same fate as countless other Polish families – his grandfather had been deported to Siberia, following the failed uprising of 1863. During the time of Partitions when Poland, carved up between Russia, Prussia and Austria, could not be found on any map, the Pilecki family remained faithful Polish patriots. In 1910, to avoid the Russification of his children, Witold's father sent him and his siblings to school in Vilnius, one of the capitals of the old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. There, Witold joined the scout movement and later became part of the Polish underground military organisation.

At the outbreak of WWI, the Pilecki family was not in Vilnius, but before the war's end Witold joined the Vilnius Self-Defence militia, which first fought the Germans holding the city in 1918, and later Red Army units. Although Poland regained its independence at the end of WWI, it was not long before Witold Pilecki was forced to fight again, this time against the Bolsheviks.

The Polish-Soviet War (1919-1920) is rarely mentioned in the West, yet it not only resulted in a Polish victory, but also stopped Lenin's communist conquest of Europe.

Few years in Witold Pilecki's life were to be peaceful. In 1926 he took over the ruined family estate in Sukurcze, and later met his future wife, Maria Ostrowska, with whom he was to have two children: Andrzej, born in 1932, and Zofia, in 1933. By 1939 war was yet again on the horizon.

## Prisoner no. 4859

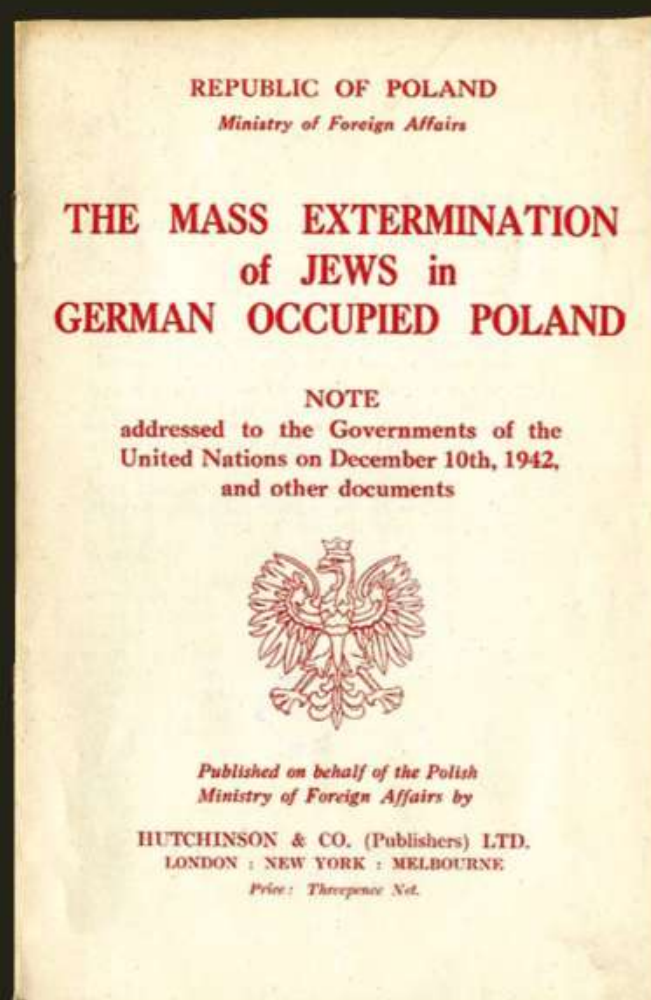
On 26 August 1939, the cavalry of the 19th Infantry Division mobilised, among them Reserve Cavalry Second Lieutenant Witold Pilecki. Reaching their deployment point on 4 September, they were assaulted by Germany's 1st Armoured Division. When defeated, the Polish soldiers dispersed, and Pilecki succeeded in crossing the Vistula River

where he joined the 41st Infantry Division. Fierce fighting followed before the division was shattered, but Pilecki never surrendered. Instead, together with his uhlans, they continued fighting as a guerrilla unit against the enemy until 17 October 1939.

In November Pilecki reached German-occupied Warsaw, and together with Major Jan

**"I BADE FAREWELL TO  
EVERYTHING I HAD HITHERTO  
KNOWN ON THIS EARTH  
AND ENTERED SOMETHING  
SEEMINGLY NO LONGER OF IT"**

*Published by the Polish Government in Exile, the first official report of the Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland was shared with the Allies in 1942*



Włodarkiewicz resolved to establish the Secret Polish Army, to continue the fight for a free Poland. The German occupation of Warsaw was exceptionally brutal from the very start. Mass arrests and executions of civil servants, doctors, teachers, lawyers and scientists began immediately, and the civilian population lived in a state of constant terror. Street round-ups and deportations for forced labour to Germany became increasingly frequent. When arrested, many underground soldiers of the Secret Army were being sent to a location in Oswiecim, southern Poland, where in 1940 the Germans set up Auschwitz concentration camp, initially intended for Polish political prisoners.

Accounts differ as to whether it was Pilecki's idea to organise a resistance unit from within Auschwitz, or General Stefan 'Grot' Rowecki's, the chief commander of the Union for Armed Struggle. Either way, Pilecki volunteered for the mission.

Like all members of the resistance, Pilecki operated under a false name: Tomasz Serafinski. The real Serafinski, a reserve lieutenant of the Warsaw defence campaign, had escaped capture and left his ID documents in the safehouse in which Pilecki was staying. Early on the morning of 19 September 1940, Pilecki deliberately walked straight into a street round-up and was arrested as Tomasz Serafinski. Alongside 1,705 individuals, he reached Auschwitz on the night of the 21-22 September 1940, where he was assigned as inmate no. 4859.

Pilecki wrote that upon arrival, one prisoner was asked by the SS to run to a post by the side of the road, only to be shot down. Ten men were then dragged out and shot at random as "collective responsibility" for the "escape" that the SS themselves had just staged. "I bade farewell to everything I had hitherto known on this earth and entered something seemingly no longer of it," he wrote.

Pilecki's organisation at Auschwitz was to have three main goals: boosting the morale of inmates; sending out reports about conditions in the camp; and preparing for an armed uprising. His 'cells' were set up in something he called "fives" – where each group operated independently of one another. This way, if





*The Polish Underground State became the largest organised resistance in occupied Europe*

**“THE GAME I WAS NOW PLAYING IN AUSCHWITZ WAS DANGEROUS. THIS SENTENCE DOES NOT REALLY CONVEY THE REALITY; IN FACT, I HAD GONE FAR BEYOND WHAT PEOPLE IN THE REAL WORLD WOULD CONSIDER DANGEROUS”**

caught, it minimised the risk for the entire organisation. By October 1940 he had set up his first ‘top fives’ and shortly after sent his first report from Auschwitz. Several weeks later, his report was received in Warsaw by General Stefan Grot Rowecki. On 18 March 1941 the first report reached London.

Pilecki’s actions were described by MRD Foot in the classic book *Six Faces Of Courage* as “so daring – at first glance, to the point of absurdity – were his notions of how to resist, that it might even be thought he had a death-wish”. Of course, Pilecki didn’t have such a death wish, but he was fully aware of the highly dangerous situation he had put himself in: “The game I was now playing in Auschwitz was dangerous. This sentence does not really convey the reality; in fact, I had gone far beyond

what people in the real world would consider dangerous,” he wrote.

Pilecki’s report from Auschwitz is a harrowing document, clearly describing the development of mass slaughter on an unprecedented scale. During his time in Auschwitz he also fell seriously ill several times, which usually was just another death sentence. However, not only did he have the psychological and physical resilience to withstand the inhuman conditions of the camp and survive, but he also continued his mission.

The military resistance organisation Pilecki managed to put together was extraordinary considering the conditions at Auschwitz. Four battalions of followers were organised, about 500 whom knew Pilecki by sight as the secret resistance leader. “For some months now

we have been able to take over the camp on more or less a daily basis,” Pilecki stated. But without outside assistance there was little chance of success in liberating the camp.

### **Resistance**

As the years passed, the Polish Underground authorities did not seem to hear Pilecki’s pleas for help in liberating the camp, and he decided to escape in the spring of 1943 in order to make his case in person. He had been a prisoner in Auschwitz for two years and seven months. With meticulous preparation, Pilecki, together with two fellow inmates, managed to get themselves on the nightshift squad in the camp bakery, which was located outside of the main camp wire. With a few seconds of extraordinary luck, they took the leap to



*Witold Pilecki leading a military parade in Lida, celebrating National Independence Day*

*Below: 'Hell on Earth' – Auschwitz was initially set up by the Germans to hold Polish political prisoners*

*Below: Photos of Witold Pilecki in camp uniform, taken inside Auschwitz. Pilecki was a prisoner there for two years and seven months*

freedom and managed to escape on the night of 26 April 1943.

The journey back to Warsaw took several months, and by a curious turn of circumstances en route, Pilecki met with the real Serafinski, now a deputy commander of a local Home Army post in the town of Nowy Wisnicz. Arriving in Warsaw in August, Pilecki personally submitted his report about the conditions of the camp and proposed military plans aimed at liberating the camp's prisoners.

In recognition of his heroic mission, Pilecki was promoted to the rank of cavalry rotamaster (equivalent to infantry captain) by General Bór-Komorowski, the commander-in-chief of the Home Army.

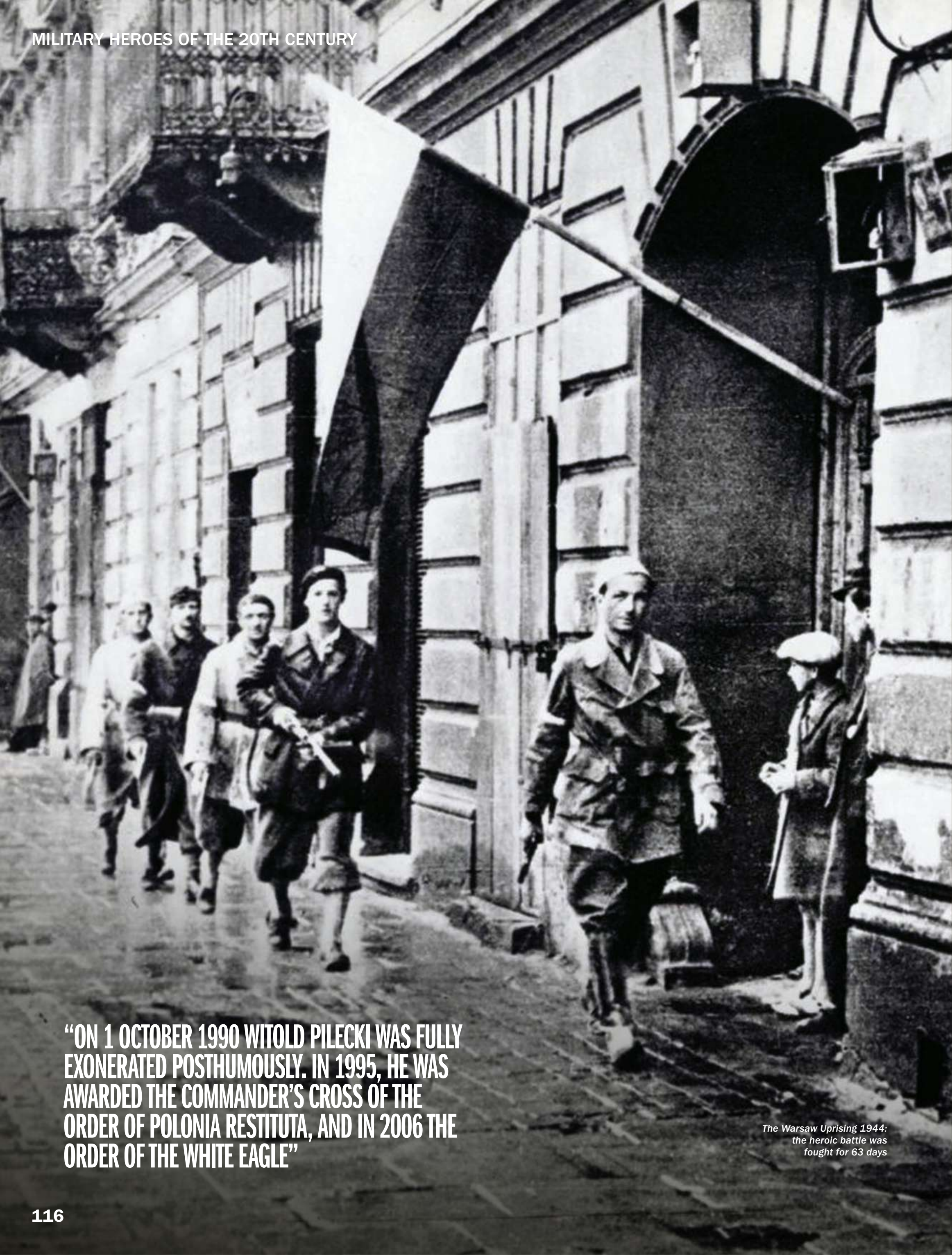
However, his plan to seize the camp and help free the inmates was not approved.

**“THE POLISH UNDERGROUND AUTHORITIES DID NOT SEEM TO HEAR PILECKI’S PLEAS FOR HELP IN LIBERATING THE CAMP; HE DECIDED TO ESCAPE IN THE SPRING OF 1943 TO MAKE HIS CASE IN PERSON. HE HAD BEEN A PRISONER IN AUSCHWITZ FOR TWO YEARS SEVEN MONTHS”**

The Home Army did consider an attack but assessed that it did not have the strength to hold off the Germans for the necessary time. Pilecki expressed his disappointment and understandable anger about the outside world's “continual, ignorant silence” over the suffering in the camp in his report.

As the tide of war turned, Pilecki became part of a new underground organisation aiming to continue the fight for Poland's independence in the ever-more likely event of a new Soviet occupation following a German defeat. However, with the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising on 1 August 1944, the work had to be abandoned. As the Polish capital became engulfed in battle, Pilecki at first fought in the rank-and-file of the Chrobry II Home Army unit, but he soon revealed his true rank and became commander of the

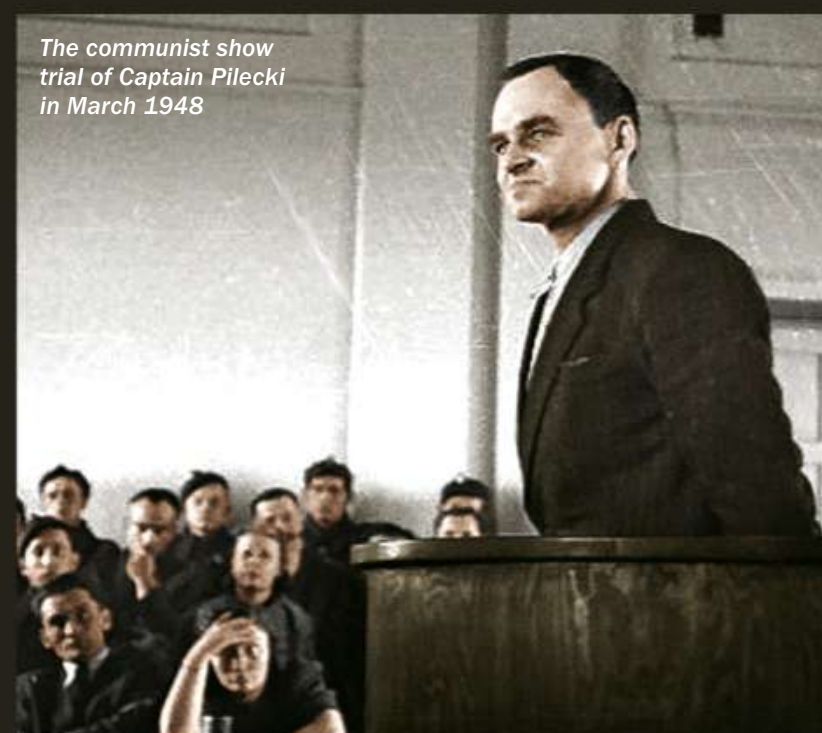




**“ON 1 OCTOBER 1990 WITOLD PILECKI WAS FULLY EXONERATED POSTHUMOUSLY. IN 1995, HE WAS AWARDED THE COMMANDER’S CROSS OF THE ORDER OF POLONIA RESTITUTA, AND IN 2006 THE ORDER OF THE WHITE EAGLE”**

*The Warsaw Uprising 1944:  
the heroic battle was  
fought for 63 days*





2nd Company, 1st Battalion. In the first weeks of the uprising his unit continuously fought, and recaptured a vital pressure point in the Warsaw borough of Wola – a pivotal position that hindered the German advance. The place became known as ‘Witold’s Redoubt’.

By mid-August his unit held another strongpoint, the former post office building, defying all German attempts to capture it for six weeks. Following the tragic end of the 63-day heroic battle, Pilecki, along with the rest of the Chrobry II unit, capitulated on 5 October 1944 and were held at the Ozarow camp, before being transported as POWs, first to Lamsdorf and later to Oflag VII-A Murnau.

In April 1945 the US Army liberated Murnau. Pilecki made plans to leave and join the II Corps of the Polish Armed Forces stationed in Italy, where he arrived in July 1945. Stationed at San Giorgio, he met with General Władysław Anders and became an officer in the 2nd Detachment of the Polish Armed Forces in the West. His task was to establish an intelligence ring collecting information on the situation in Poland. Preparing for the assignment, Pilecki, more than anyone, must have understood the danger he faced. He redeployed to Poland on 22

October 1945. Along with his two companions, he reached Warsaw on 8 December 1945.

In Warsaw, he gradually created his own network, selected from former soldiers of the Home Army and the Auschwitz conspiracy. He collected classified information on the terror operations of the NKVD, the Office of Security and on the political and financial cooperations established between Poland’s newly installed Soviet-friendly government and the USSR.

### Beyond bravery

In June 1946, Pilecki obtained an order from General Anders to immediately leave for the West, as communist authorities were closing in on him and his network. But he did not leave. Perhaps he already knew by then that his fate was sealed.

On 8 May 1947, Captain Witold Pilecki was arrested. Subjected to the most brutal torture techniques, this time at the hands of his Soviet-trained countrymen, Pilecki’s interrogations were supervised in person by Colonel Józef Rozanski, the head of the MBP/UB (‘Ministry of Public Security’, the post-war communist secret police). When Pilecki’s wife came to visit him in Mokotów prison, he spoke in regards to the torture he was enduring there, and he whispered to her, “Auschwitz was mere child’s play”.

The show trial against Captain Pilecki and his colleagues began on 3 March 1948. Accused of being a traitor and a “Western spy”, Witold Pilecki was declared by the court to be “a paid agent of General Anders’s Intelligence Service”, “betraying state secrets” and accused of planning armed attacks against the communist secret police. On 15 March Captain Pilecki was sentenced to death.

At 9.30pm on 25 May 1948 Captain Pilecki was executed in the notorious prison at Rakowieczka Street 37, murdered by a bullet to the back of his head. His burial place was never revealed, yet his memory lived on. Pilecki’s widow and children continued their appeals for his exoneration. Churches held Mass in his memory. Eventually, as communism fell, streets, squares and schools named in his honour began to appear.

On 1 October 1990 Witold Pilecki was fully exonerated posthumously. In 1995, he was awarded the Commander’s Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, and in 2006 the Order of the White Eagle.

Today, Captain Witold Pilecki is remembered as the bravest of the brave, and his heroic life stands as a symbol, reflecting the fates of so many of his countrymen and women, who fought for Poland’s freedom and sacrificed everything in the fight against both Nazism and Stalinism alike.

In the end, the best epitaph to Pilecki’s life and extraordinary courage are in his own words: “I have tried to live my life in such a way, so that in the hour of my death I would rather feel joy than fear.”



**“TODAY, CAPTAIN WITOLD PILECKI IS REMEMBERED AS THE BRAVEST OF THE BRAVE, AND HIS HEROIC LIFE STANDS AS A SYMBOL”**





# OPERATION NIMROD



WORDS ROBIN HORSFALL

Robin joined the SAS in 1978 and was a member of the Nimrod assault team. He went on to serve with the Regiment during the Falklands War, then left the British Army two years later. Today he is a professional speaker, sharing his knowledge with audiences around the world. His autobiography, *Fighting Scared*, details his journey from a troubled childhood

to serving in the world's elite military and beyond. In this brief history of Operation Nimrod, Robin has included extracts from *Fighting Scared*, which is available now on Kindle.

**"THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT ALLOCATED A GENEROUS BUDGET AND ORDERED THE SAS TO FORM A COUNTER-TERRORIST TEAM AT THEIR BASE IN HEREFORD, UK. THE TEAM HAD TO BE READY TO MOVE ANYWHERE AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE – THEIR OPERATIONAL NAME WAS PAGODA"**



On 30 April, 1980, six terrorists stormed the Iranian Embassy in London and took 23 hostages. After days of negotiation, one SAS team was tasked with ending the siege. This is their story, as told by one of their number

In 1976, the Special Air Service (SAS) returned to the UK from a secret war in Oman. Their experience of fighting an infantry war with artillery and air support was of very little use on the streets of Northern Ireland and they struggled to find a new role for themselves. Flexible as always, they found their niche in a new field of warfare – counter-terrorism.

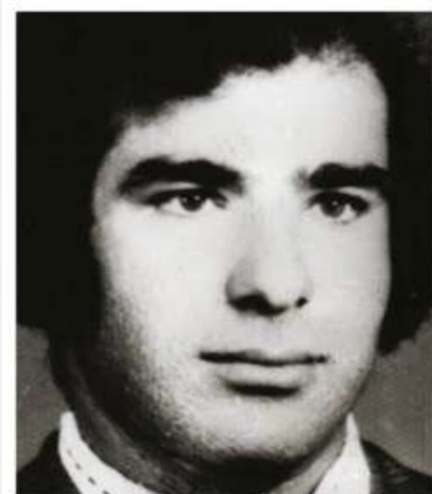
At the Munich Olympic Games in 1972, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) murdered 11 Israeli athletes and a police officer during a botched rescue attempt. This tragedy exposed the need for an effective, highly trained force that would deal with incidents where hostages were held to ransom for political objectives. The British Government allocated a generous budget and ordered the SAS to form a counter-terrorist team at their base in Hereford, UK. The team had to be ready to move anywhere at a moment's notice. Their operational name was 'Pagoda'.

Between 1970 and 1980, terrorist groups such as West Germany's Baader-Meinhof gang, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the PLO carried out successful and deadly operations. They drew media attention to their issues and committed atrocities, while often escaping unmolested. The most extreme example occurred on 4 November 1979, when Iranian Revolutionary Guards took over the United States Embassy in Tehran. Eighteen months later, on 24 April 1980, President Jimmy Carter sent in US special forces to rescue the hostages who had been held for 444 days. Operation 'Eagle Claw' failed, with the tragic loss of eight American lives. Following that disaster, the morale of the Western world plunged to an all-time low.

Encouraged by the perceived weakness of Western democracies, Iraq's ruler Saddam Hussein looked for an opportunity to take advantage in his ongoing war with Iran. Sami Mohammed Ali, an officer in the Iraqi Secret Service, spent the first months of 1980 training a six-man team of young activists. They came from Arabistan, an oil-rich area in the south of Iran. The men wanted autonomy for their region following Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution.

In response to Arabistani demands, the revolutionary government of Iran arrested and imprisoned 91 people without trial. Sami's team planned to take over the Iranian Embassy at Princes Gate in London and hold the staff as hostages. They would demand the release of the Arabistani prisoners and draw international attention to their cause.





Sami told his group that other Arab countries supported their mission, while also assuring them that when their mission was over, Arab ambassadors would negotiate their safe return to Iraq.

When Sami's team arrived in London at the beginning of April, he provided them with semi-automatic pistols, automatic machine pistols and Russian-manufactured hand grenades. These were allegedly delivered to the UK in Iraqi diplomatic bags. The scene was set for yet another terrorist victory.

## The siege begins

Sami Mohammed Ali deployed his team in London, at 11:30, on Wednesday 30 April, 1980. He then took a taxi to Heathrow Airport to make his escape from the country. By pure coincidence, at 11:25, embassy staff invited their door guard, Police Constable Trevor Lock, to come inside for a cup of coffee. While he was inside, the six-man terrorist team entered the open door and shot a long burst of automatic fire into the ceiling. Within minutes they had secured the four-storey, 54-room building and had taken 23 hostages. These included 19 embassy staff, Trevor Lock, BBC sound recordist Sim Harris, BBC news producer Chris Cramer and Syrian journalist Mustapha Karkouti, who had all been inside applying for visas.

The response by the Metropolitan Police, under the command of Deputy Assistant Commissioner John Dellow, was immediate and efficient. The building was secured front and rear and all of the adjacent buildings were evacuated.

Terrorist leader Salim immediately made demands for the release of the Arabastani prisoners and autonomy for his region. He gave a deadline of 24 hours, expiring at noon the next day, and threatened to kill all of the hostages if his demands were not met.

In Downing Street, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's cabinet assembled at the cabinet office briefing room known as 'Cobra' to discuss

their response. Thatcher was adamant that she would not give in to terrorists, but she would not authorise a military assault unless the terrorists killed a hostage. Until that happened, her policy was to contain the situation, remain calm and hope that the police could negotiate the release of the hostages and the surrender of the terrorists – without casualties.

In Hereford, the Pagoda team were preparing for a routine training exercise in Edinburgh with the Scottish police. The first indication that something had changed was when the noon move to Scotland was postponed.

"Big Bob smiled coldly. 'My Tikka is ready,' he said, closing one eye and squeezing an imaginary trigger. At about midday, Major [Gullen] called us into the team room... The exercise was off."

The team spent the following seven hours listening to the BBC news and hoping for permission to move.

By 19:00, no authorisation had been received from the government, so SAS Colonel Mike Rose took the initiative and moved his men closer to London. All their equipment was carried in six white Range Rovers, six Ford Transit vans and a large, yellow pan-technician truck. They left in small groups with orders to rendezvous at the Army Education Corps barracks in Beaconsfield some 20 miles west of London. By midnight, the teams had successfully travelled the 120 miles when they were then officially authorised to move to Regent's Park Barracks in central London.

**"HE GAVE A DEADLINE OF 24 HOURS, EXPIRING AT NOON THE NEXT DAY, AND THREATENED TO KILL ALL OF THE HOSTAGES IF HIS DEMANDS WERE NOT MET"**

*Above, left: An armoured personnel carrier*

*Above: A total of six terrorists attacked the Embassy, clockwise from top left: Themir Mohammed Hussein, Shakir Abdullah Radhil, Awn Ali Mohammed, Shakir Sultan Said, Makki Hanoun Ali, Fowzi Badavi Nejad*

Once officially sanctioned, the mission was then given the code name: NIMROD.

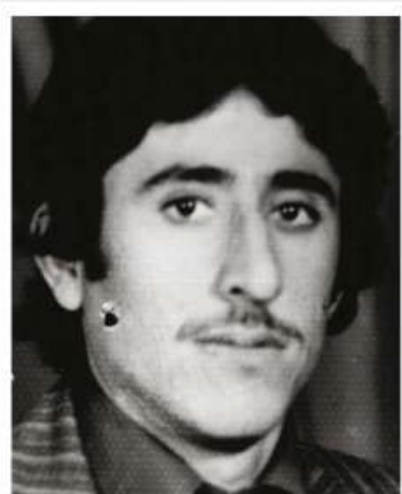
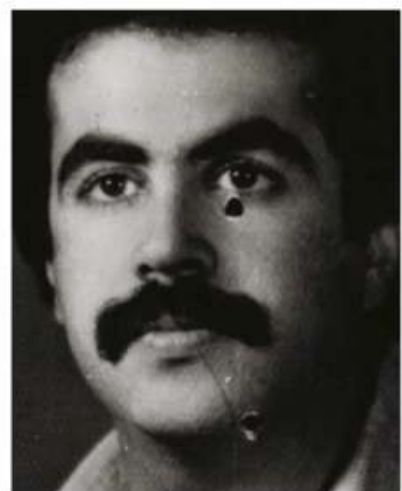
Tension increased on the second day, when Iran refused to consider the terrorists' demands and left all negotiations firmly in the hands of the British authorities. As the noon deadline approached, the police were left hoping for the best, while appeals and promises were made by negotiators in the hope of gaining more time. "The situation was close to panic," said Sim Harris, "as the hostages believed that they were about to die." Faisal, Salim's second in command, was establishing himself as the tough guy. He repeatedly threatened to execute the hostages and was seen to pull and replace the pin of a hand grenade during moments of increased excitement.

While Faisal was establishing his credentials, Abbas Lavasani, the Iranian chargé d'affaires, was setting out his stall as a zealot. Lavasani made it clear that he wanted to be a martyr for his religion. Provocative and difficult, he was only prevented from being shot in the first few days of the siege by the intervention of Mustapha Karkouti.

Chris Cramer began to feign illness as soon as the siege began, with a performance that was so desperate and convincing that he was released. Trevor Lock instructed Cramer to give as much information as possible to the police about the situation inside, including types and numbers of weapons and, most importantly, the number of terrorists.

On the evening of day two, SAS troop commanders completed a reconnaissance of the embassy building and established a holding area for the team. The chosen area was only one door away from the embassy at numbers 13-15 Princes Gate – the headquarters of The Royal College of General Practitioners. Major





*Police marksman cordon off the Iranian Embassy during the siege*

**“FAISAL, SALIM’S SECOND IN COMMAND, WAS ESTABLISHING HIMSELF AS THE TOUGH GUY. HE REPEATEDLY THREATENED TO EXECUTE THE HOSTAGES AND WAS SEEN TO PULL AND REPLACE THE PIN OF A HAND GRENADE DURING MOMENTS OF INCREASED EXCITEMENT”**

*Hector Gullan (in camouflage) and his command group during the assault*





**SAS prepare to abseil onto the rear balcony of the Iranian Embassy**



Hector Gullen, B Squadron's commander, prepared his men to move at midnight hidden in the back of two pan-technician trucks. Between 01:00 and 02:00, B Squadron, with all of their equipment, moved silently into their holding area. The unit claimed 68 men on the ground including support arms.

On day three, all phone lines to the embassy were cut and a field phone was passed to the building. This move meant that Salim could only speak to the trained police negotiators, and forced him to request essentials such as food via the police. By controlling his access to the outside world, the negotiators hoped to manipulate Salim.

Intelligence services attempted to place listening devices inside the walls and cavities of the embassy, but squeaky noises from hand-operated drills were heard inside. Trevor Lock persuaded Salim that this noise was caused by mice, but the unconvinced Salim threatened to kill someone if the noise didn't cease. In response to his threat, aircraft approaching Heathrow were directed to fly over Knightsbridge and roadworks with drilling were started nearby. The noise was enough to hide the sounds of the drills, plus the movements of the SAS on the roof, searching for entry points and preparing belays for their abseil ropes.

While the SAS waited, half were on immediate standby, fully dressed except for their gas masks, while the remainder were stripped down to overalls so that they could rest. An 'Immediate Action Plan' had been put in place as soon as the troops were on the ground. If the terrorists started to kill people then six eight-man teams would make an entry and clear their pre-designated areas, hoping to

reduce the casualty list to a minimum. As time passed, information about the construction of the building and intelligence about the terrorists was collated so that a more precise 'Deliberate Action Plan' could be developed.

By day four, the Deliberate Action Plan started to take form. Photos of the terrorists had been obtained from visa applications, Cramer had disclosed his information and the embassy janitor had identified armoured windows and doors. Blueprints of the building were secured from architectural records, which showed the exact layout of every room.

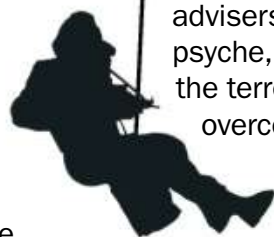
Salim used Trevor Lock, Sim Harris and Mustapha Karkouti as go-betweens and advisers, hoping for insights into the British psyche, while they in turn hoped to persuade the terrorists to give up. Under his heavy overcoat, Lock still had his .38 Smith and Wesson revolver with six rounds. Salim believed that all British police officers

were unarmed, so Lock had only received a rudimentary search during the takeover. The weapon weighed heavily on Lock's mind as threats were repeatedly made to "kill a hostage".

Mustapha tried to convince Salim that surrender now would be a victory – no one had been injured and their cause had been brought to the world's attention. Mustapha suggested asking for a radio announcement by the BBC. Salim still hoped for the intervention of Arab ambassadors but relented and asked the negotiators to make the suggested announcement. The negotiators used this moment to barter for the release of one hostage – Salim agreed and chose Mustapha.

An announcement was made at 9pm on the BBC World Service. Mustapha was released and the terrorists were ecstatic. It seemed at this moment that the siege would end peacefully – the tension subsided and hopes were high. The departure of Mustapha, however, had taken an intelligent, mature and steady man who spoke Arabic out of the equation. When Faisal scribbled "Down with Khomeini" on a wall, no one with enough influence was there to stop Lavasani from overreacting. He provoked Faisal and brought the tension back to a fever pitch. Salim returned to his demands for an ambassador in the belief that Sami, his handler, had told him the truth. Sadly, Salim's whole team had been set up by Iraqi intelligence. No agreements had been made and, even in the unlikely event that they had, they were denied. This created an impasse – there were no ambassadors and Salim thought the police were lying to him.

On Monday 5 May, at 11:00, Faisal took Lavasani down to the ground floor, away from the other hostages. He tied his hands and blindfolded him, then forced him to kneel. Outside the



**"SALIM BELIEVED THAT ALL BRITISH POLICE OFFICERS WERE UNARMED, SO LOCK HAD ONLY RECEIVED A RUDIMENTARY SEARCH DURING THE TAKEOVER. THE WEAPON WEIGHED HEAVILY ON LOCK'S MIND AS THREATS WERE REPEATEDLY MADE TO 'KILL A HOSTAGE'"**





## THE PAGODA TEAM

At the time of the embassy siege, the 22nd Special Air Service Regiment was based at Bradbury Lines, Hereford. 'The Regiment' consisted of four regular Sabre Squadrons – A, B, D and G – all identical in makeup with a full complement of 70 men, including signallers and support staff. The squadrons rotated every six months, becoming the Pagoda team once every two years. At the start of April 1980, it was once again the turn of B Squadron; most of the men were on their second or third Pagoda tour.

Training for the Pagoda team consisted of continuous practice assaults on buildings, aircraft, trains, ships in harbour, and moving vehicles. The whole team were trained as assault troops, but half were also trained as snipers.

Standard **NBC GAS SUIT** with hood and a standard pair of black, cotton overalls.

**RADIO COMMUNICATIONS** with a throat microphone.

**KNIFE** for cutting away obstacles.

**BODY ARMOUR** capable of stopping low velocity projectiles.

Suede **OVER JACKET** with pouches for ammo.

**BROWNING 9MM AUTOMATIC PISTOLS** with one (extended) 20 and two 13-round magazines.

**SR6** gas mask.

**HECKLER AND KOCH 9MM MP5** automatic sub machine pistol with three 30-round magazines strapped by a quick-release harness across the chest.

**LEATHER BELT** with low-slung pistol holster and MP5 magazine pouches.

### IN ADDITION TO THIS EQUIPMENT, THE SNIPERS HAD:

- ★ One 7.62mm L42 sniper rifle with an X3 scope
- ★ One .225 Tikka Finlander hunting rifle with a X10 day scope
- ★ One .225 Tikka Finlander hunting rifle with an image intensification night scope
- ★ Camouflage suits

### AMMUNITION CARRIED BY THE ASSAULT TEAM MEMBERS INCLUDED:

- ★ 46 X 9mm pistol rounds
- ★ 90 X 9mm machine pistol rounds
- ★ 'Flash Bang' stun grenades that banged, whistled, flashed and released CS gas

Training took place day and night, five days a week. Repetition and practice were the key words. In a building known as 'the killing house', soldiers took it in turns to sit in chairs surrounded by targets as team members assaulted the room with live ammunition. Men stood in darkened rooms with their shoulders touching targets as comrades wearing gas masks turned, drew their weapons and fired live rounds. With concentrated training and almost unlimited ammunition, the men were expected to hit a four-inch circle in a human head from five metres without aiming. Snipers were able to guarantee a head shot at ranges of up to 200 metres.

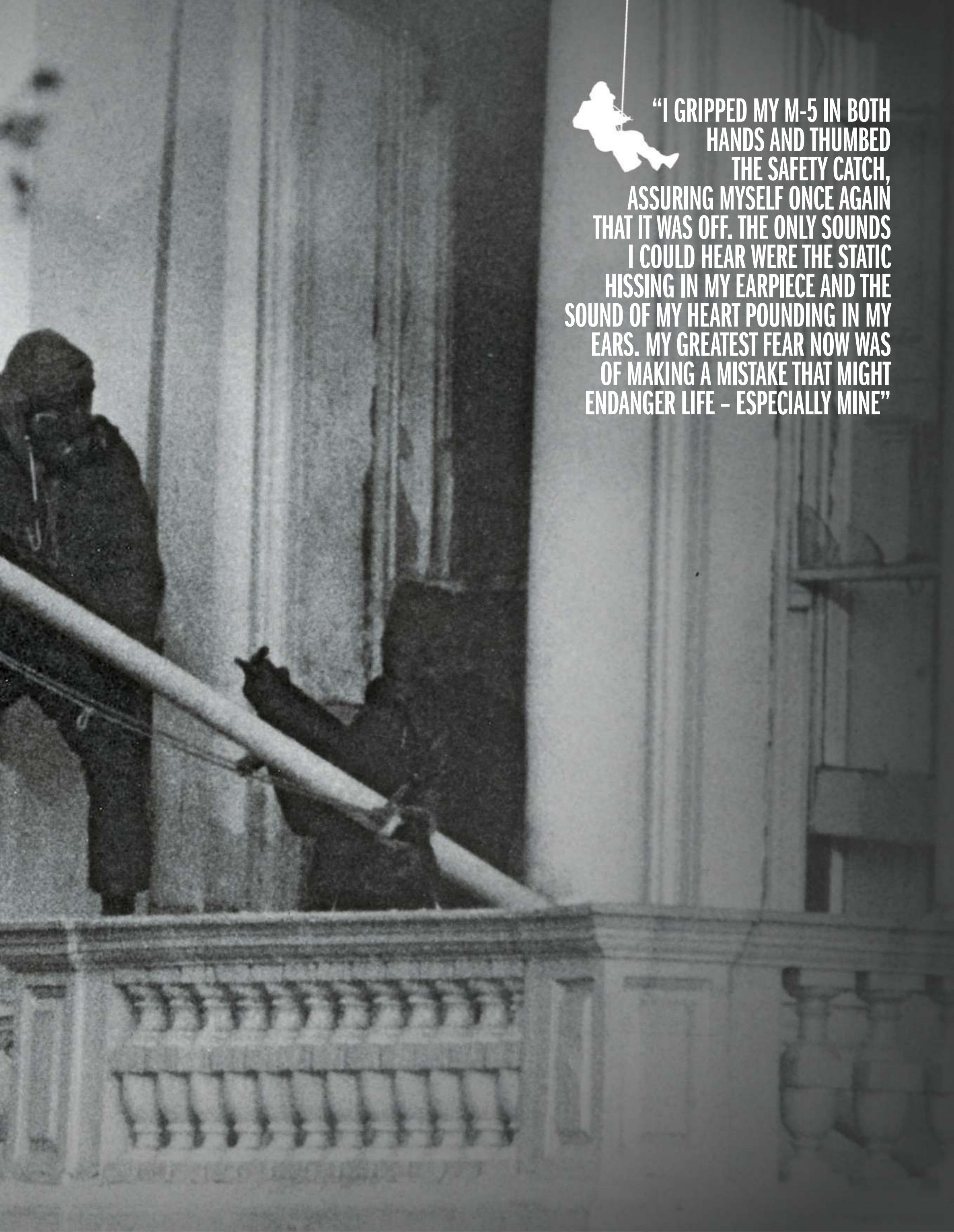
**“WITH CONCENTRATED TRAINING AND ALMOST UNLIMITED AMMUNITION, THE MEN WERE EXPECTED TO HIT A FOUR-INCH CIRCLE IN A HUMAN HEAD FROM FIVE METRES WITHOUT AIMING”**





*Entering from the front balcony after the initial explosion to gain entry*



A black and white photograph showing a person rappelling down a rope. The person is in silhouette, wearing a helmet and gear, and is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the frame. They are holding onto a rope that extends from the top of the image. The background is a large, light-colored building with vertical architectural lines. In the lower left, there is a balcony with a decorative railing. The overall scene suggests a high-altitude or rescue operation.

**"I GRIPPED MY M-5 IN BOTH  
HANDS AND THUMBED  
THE SAFETY CATCH,  
ASSURING MYSELF ONCE AGAIN  
THAT IT WAS OFF. THE ONLY SOUNDS  
I COULD HEAR WERE THE STATIC  
HISSING IN MY EARPIECE AND THE  
SOUND OF MY HEART POUNDING IN MY  
EARS. MY GREATEST FEAR NOW WAS  
OF MAKING A MISTAKE THAT MIGHT  
ENDANGER LIFE - ESPECIALLY MINE"**



building, three pistol shots were heard. The SAS stood by once again for an immediate assault, but time passed and no indication was given about what the shots meant.

It was possible that a hostage had been killed. In preparation, Major Gullen briefed his men on his Deliberate Action Plan. Six teams of eight men would silently approach different entry points on the five floors, from basement to roof. Once in position, they would place specially shaped frame charges on the windows and doors. When all of the groups were ready, the command “GO-GO-GO” would be given and the assault would begin.

The shaped charges would direct most of the explosive effect outwards, removing the entrances and minimising the risk to those inside. The groups would enter the building and clear their allocated areas – the mission was to rescue the hostages. The men were reminded about the laws of self-defence and what constituted a lawful killing. They had to believe that their lives, or the lives of those they were trying to protect, were in danger for the law to support them against charges of murder. The prime minister sent a message in which she said, “I don’t want any martyrs.” In other words – get it right!

At 06.50, Lavasani’s body was unceremoniously thrown out of the front door and quickly recovered by two plain-clothes police officers carrying a stretcher. Lavasani’s body had two shots to the head and one to the chest – he had been executed. Salim made another deadline, which he now expected to be taken seriously. He wanted the ambassadors by 07:00 or he would kill another hostage.

Home Secretary William Whitelaw instructed Deputy Assistant Commissioner Peter Neivens to give written authority to the army to take control. When this note was signed at 07:07, it legally sanctioned military action and a building assault by the SAS.

The negotiators played for time, telling Salim the ambassadors were on route and that they would all be driven to Heathrow as soon as the ambassadors arrived. Salim was suspicious, but he hesitated long enough for the SAS to get into position. At 07:23, Salim was on the phone to the senior police negotiator Detective Chief Inspector Max Vernon, who said that as he saw the SAS approach the building he heard a voice in his head singing, “You’re going to die, you’re going to die,” over and over and over.

At the rear of the building, the SAS team slid over the edge of the roof and began to abseil down towards the first floor balcony. Around them, other teams approached the back door, the top floor fire exits and the basement doors, while a final group was approaching the front windows – all in full view of a hundred live television cameras.

“I crept quietly out of the back door of the college and across the concrete

patio towards the rear door of the embassy. I looked ahead of me at Robert as he began to insert detonators into the explosives and place them on the back door.

“Then I looked up. Above me, four men began to descend slowly from the roof on their abseil ropes. Behind me, Big Bob was wielding an eight-pound sledgehammer as back up, should it be needed to get through the door.

“I gripped my M-5 in both hands and thumbed the safety catch, assuring myself once again that it was off. The only sounds I could hear were the static hissing in my earpiece and the sound of my heart pounding in my ears. My greatest fear now was of making a mistake that might endanger life – especially mine. My mind raced. Watch the windows, Robin. What do I do if someone looks out now? Don’t rush. Is my pistol still in my holster? Where is my partner?

“The police dogs, which were being held back just inside the doors of the college, began to feel the tension in their handlers and started barking and howling. ‘Why don’t you shut the bastard dogs up?’ I thought. The fear that for so long had been my greatest enemy welled up inside me like a balloon, waiting to escape from my throat. Hello, I thought, I’m glad you’re here. Without you, I wouldn’t be functioning at my best. I needed to be scared to be alert.”

At the rear of the building, an unexpected mistake occurred when one of the abseillers put his foot through a glass window. Salim heard the noise and left the telephone to investigate. Major Gullen, realising the game was up, gave the “GO-GO-GO” early. Troops exploded their frame charges, destroying the windows and doors. The team on the ground floor hadn’t



**“BEHIND ME, BIG BOB WAS WIELDING AN EIGHT-POUND SLEDGEHAMMER AS BACK UP, SHOULD IT BE NEEDED TO GET THROUGH THE DOOR”**

**BBC sound man Sim Harris leaps from the front balcony to escape the flames**





finished laying their charges and smashed the door in with a sledgehammer. Flash bangs were thrown inside closely followed by the troops.

Inside, on the first floor, Trevor Lock grabbed Salim and drew his pistol. He later recalled the surprise in Salim's eyes when he saw the gun that Lock had kept hidden for six days. The door burst open and Lock heard a voice telling him to move away. In seconds, Salim was dead.

On the first floor balcony, an abseiler was trapped on his rope above the balcony window.

"I looked up as three bullet holes appeared in the window above my head. Dangling on his rope, about 12 feet above the balcony and 20 feet from the ground, was one of the assault team. He was stuck. His rope jammed in the figure-of-eight abseil device attached to his harness. The curtains beneath him had been set on fire by the grenades that had exploded when the first group had entered. The flames were climbing higher and higher and were now lapping against his legs. His screams of pain sounded over the radio."

Beneath him, Sergeant Tommy Palmer had thrown his flashbang inside and entered the building. The flames set his head and gas mask alight and he was forced momentarily to retreat, but only long enough for him to discard the mask and enter the gas-filled building unprotected. He quickly identified two terrorists in the Telex room who had just shot and killed Ali Akbar Samadzadeh and wounded Ahmad Dadgar. Palmer identified a grenade and promptly killed them.

After entering from the front balcony, John McAleese and his group discovered two armed terrorists. John's description of the event was simple and concise: "Bang, bang, job done."

## **"WITHOUT HESITATION I FIRED ONE SHORT BURST OF FOUR ROUNDS AT HIS CHEST. TWO OTHER TEAM MEMBERS ALSO OPENED FIRE SIMULTANEOUSLY. FAISAL SLUMPED TO THE FLOOR WITH 27 HOLES IN HIM"**

Only two terrorists remained alive. On the stairs leading down to the ground floor, the hostages were passed hand-to-hand towards the rear doors. Once on the grass at the rear of the building, they were all forced to the ground and handcuffed. This action controlled all the frightened participants and kept them safe from further harm.

Back inside, on the stairs, there was a scuffle – a voice shouted "Grenade!" – Faisal had placed himself among the hostages; as he reached the ground floor three men opened fire.

"Without hesitation I fired one short burst of four rounds at his chest. Two other team members also opened fire simultaneously. Faisal slumped to the floor with 27 holes in him. He didn't spasm or spurt blood everywhere. He simply crumpled up like a bundle of rags and died."

The grenade that he had previously used to threaten the hostages rolled from his dead hand. The pin was still inserted. The building burned fiercely as the last hostage departed

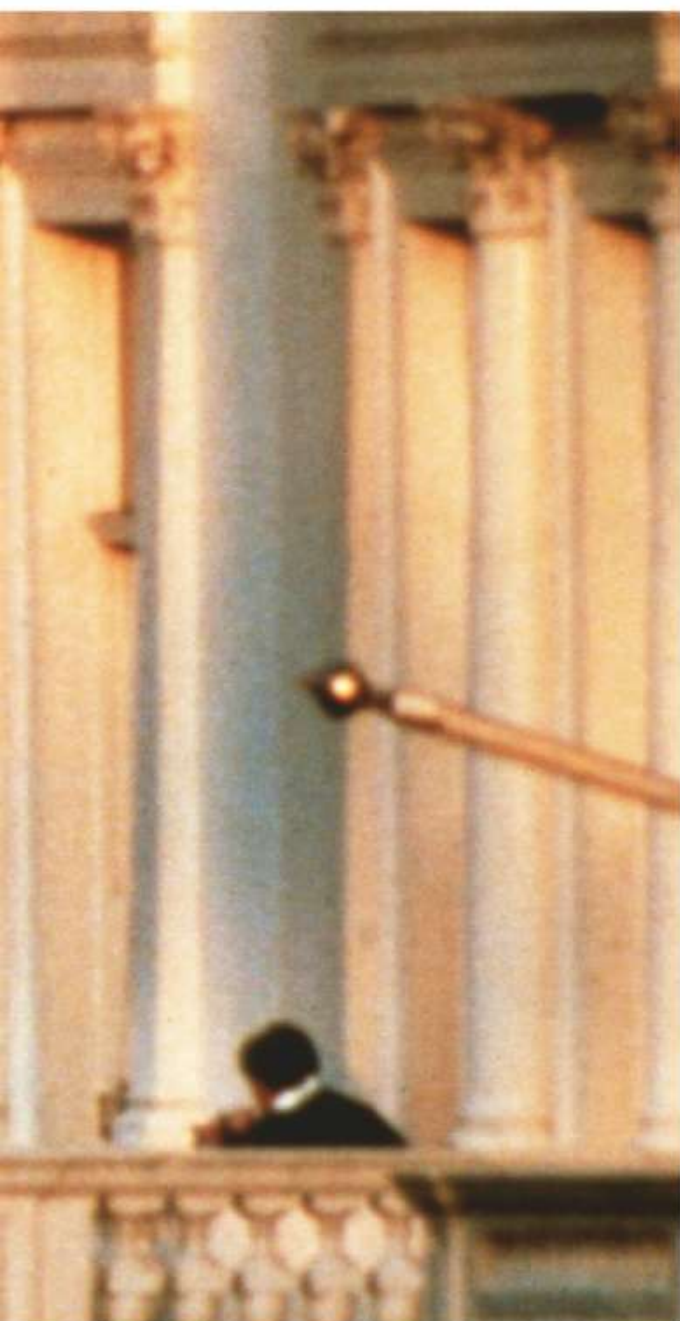
and the remaining soldiers moved outside to assist at the hostage holding area. Handcuffed on the grass, Sim Harris nodded his head vigorously to his left to tell the soldiers that the man lying beside him was Fawzi Najad, the surviving terrorist. Najad was lifted up and moved away towards the building and placed a safe distance from the others.

Eleven minutes had passed from initiation to completion. During that time, two SAS soldiers were injured, one hostage was murdered, two were wounded by the terrorists and a further 17 hostages were rescued in good health. Five terrorists were lawfully killed by the SAS and one was captured.

The team quickly handed the situation over to the police and returned to their holding area to reorganise their equipment. A short time later the Home Secretary arrived to give his thanks. He was in tears and said, "I knew it would be good, but I never thought it would be this good." Whitelaw had been given an estimate of up to 20 per cent casualties by SAS Brigadier Peter de la Billière. One dead hostage was terribly sad, but it was a lot better than five. William Whitelaw wanted to parade the troops to the press, but he was politely informed by Major Gullen that they wished to remain anonymous.

While the world sat back in wild admiration, the SAS stacked their gear and crept into the back of their civilian trucks to withdraw to Regent's Park Barracks. There they would recover their vehicles and return quickly to Hereford. They were still on call and needed to be ready – another attack could be waiting to happen anywhere, anytime.

At 21:00, while they stacked their kit in their vehicles, it was announced that the prime



*Troops landing on the rear balcony to make their entry into the embassy*



minister would be visiting to congratulate “her boys”. She arrived, accompanied by her husband Denis, and personally thanked each man. She then joined them to watch a replay of the assault on the BBC News at 10. A famous anecdote still resounds in the bars of Hereford about this moment, when legendary Scotsman John McAleese said to the prime minister, “Hey hun, get yer f\*\*\*ing head oot o the wee. I canna see the telly.” Some cringed, some laughed, but Mrs Thatcher simply apologised and moved aside.

The team returned slowly in dribs and drabs to Hereford. One team arrived late following a puncture that drove them into the sanctuary of the Heston Service Station on the M4 motorway. Unfortunately, the tools to change their wheel were hidden beneath all their guns and equipment.

“As we were trying to work out what to do, I saw an AA van parked about 50 yards away. ‘I know, I’ll get the AA to change it.’ I said. Before anyone could protest, I strolled over and asked the AA driver if he had heard about what had happened in London that day. He said that he had, becoming quite animated about the events. ‘Well I’m one of the blokes who did it,’ I told him, ‘and I have a problem.’ I explained our predicament to him and, not sure whether to believe me or not, he drove over to take a look, probably as much out of curiosity as anything else. Confronted by four tired-looking heavies, and with the signal from our police radio bleeping in the front of the vehicle, he was convinced and changed the wheel for us.”

A week later, B Squadron received an engraved plaque from the Commander of US

Special Forces, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The plaque read: “To the brave British commandos who assaulted the Iranian Embassy in London on 5 May 1980. It just goes to show you can’t make chicken salad out of chicken shit.”

The assault on the Iranian Embassy was a lift for the morale of the free world. A classic special-forces operation. The foresight of the British Government to finance and support the Pagoda team was exceptional. The strong leadership and determination of the government ensured that the terrorists would never succeed. However, it was the training and calibre of the men that made it all possible.

Operation Nimrod ended the era of hostage taking in the UK for the next 20 years and, as the SAS taught their skills elsewhere, they gave the same deterrent to other countries. The combination of best man, best management and adequate financial commitment made them the envy of the world. The SAS maintained their silence for 22 years until, in 2002, the BBC persuaded three of them to reveal the truth about those six days, in Louise Norman’s documentary, *SAS: Iranian Embassy Siege*.

The trauma of the events dramatically affected most of the hostages and negotiators. None of the SAS men, however, were psychologically injured by the events on that day. The surviving team members know that they still hold a special place in British history and are proud that they saved so many lives.

Fawzi Najad was sentenced to life imprisonment for murder and was released after serving 27 years. He now lives peacefully as a mini-cab driver in south London.

**“OPERATION NIMROD ENDED THE ERA OF OF HOSTAGE TAKING IN THE UK FOR THE NEXT 20 YEARS AND AS THE SAS TAUGHT THEIR SKILLS ELSEWHERE, THEY GAVE THE SAME DETERRENT TO OTHER COUNTRIES”**

Left: PC Trevor Lock holds a press conference at Scotland Yard after the end of the siege



SAS secure the hostages on the lawn to the rear of the Iranian Embassy. One of the terrorists would be found in their number



- IN MEMORY OF ASSAULT TEAM MEMBERS SINCE DEPARTED:**
- ★ Staff Sergeant John McAleese QGM
  - ★ Sergeant Thomas Palmer QGM
  - ★ Sergeant David Playford
  - ★ Sergeant Keith Johnson
  - ★ Captain Frank Collins
  - ★ Sgt Dom Pavlov





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# THE FALKLANDS OUR WAR

WORDS TOM GARNER

37 years after the United Kingdom and Argentina fought in the South Atlantic, four British veterans recall their experiences of a 'small' war that had huge consequences

**I**n April 1982, Britain was surprised to find itself at war with Argentina over a group of windswept, sparsely populated islands thousands of miles away. On 2 April, an Argentinean military force landed on the Falkland Islands and declared British rule to be over. This was the first invasion of British territory since WWII and the result would be a short but bloody war that decided the political fate of both countries.

The disputed ownership of the islands goes back to at least the early 19th century but the situation dramatically escalated after a change in Argentinean domestic policies. Since 1976, the Argentine Army had ruled the country under a military dictatorship that brutally suppressed human rights and sent inflation rates soaring. In an attempt to distract attention away from domestic problems, President Leopoldo Galtieri gambled on 'reclaiming' the Falklands (or 'Malvinas') in the hope that the British would not respond. He had not reckoned on the resolve of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher or the quality of the subsequent British Task Force sent to retake the islands.

After the war, the Argentine Nobel Literature Laureate Jorge Luis Borges wrote, "The Falklands thing was a fight between two bald men over a comb." Nevertheless, for those who fought, the Falklands was an intense experience.

Despite being fought in a remote location, and for only a short duration of 74 days, 649 Argentines and 255 British soldiers lost their lives. Moreover, there were almost 2,000 combined non-fatal casualties and three civilian islanders were killed. Tens of thousands of soldiers were also taken prisoner, the vast majority Argentinean, and the war is still an emotive issue in both countries.

Exactly 35 years on, four British veterans from all levels reflect on their experiences of fighting far from home in a war that was small in scale, tough in execution and significant in its ramifications.



In the 74 days British and Argentinian forces fought over the Falklands, more than 900 people lost their lives

## VICTORY AGAINST THE ODDS

**JULIAN THOMPSON**

**1982 RANK: BRIGADIER**



As commander of 3 Commando Brigade, Thompson was tasked with co-planning the San Carlos amphibious landings, and his brigade fought in all but one of the land battles.

## INSIDE 'OPERATION MIKADO'

**ROBIN HORSFALL**

**1982 RANK: CORPORAL**



An experienced member of the elite Special Air Service (SAS), Horsfall was tasked with training for a 'suicide mission' into mainland Argentina.

**"THIS WAS THE FIRST INVASION OF BRITISH TERRITORY SINCE WWII AND THE RESULT WOULD BE A SHORT BUT BLOODY WAR"**

## THE BATTLE OF WIRELESS RIDGE

**PHILIP NEAME**

**1982 RANK: MAJOR**



A former officer in 2nd Battalion, Parachute Regiment, Neame took part in one of the final battles to capture the capital of Stanley.

## SURVIVAL, CARE AND RECONCILIATION

**SIMON WESTON**

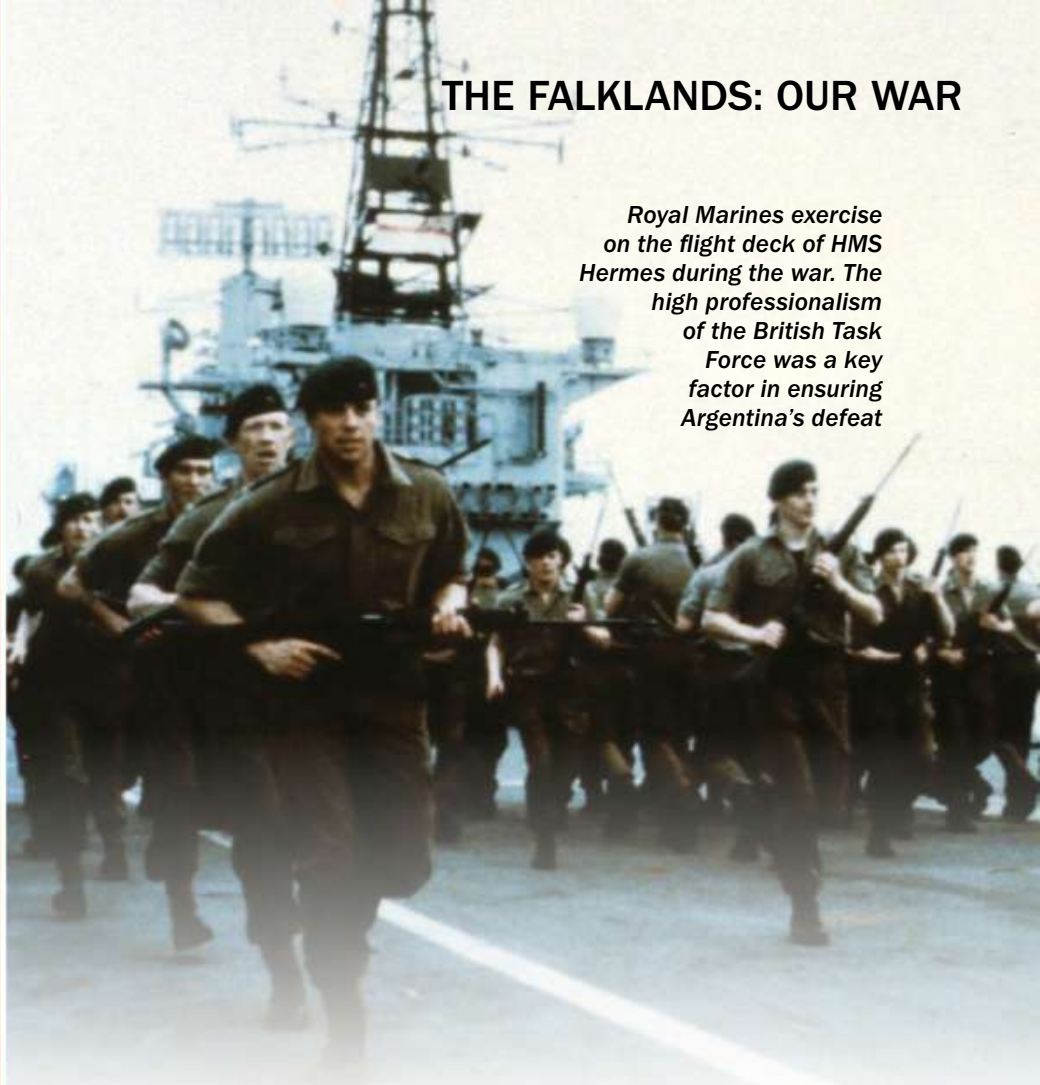
**1982 RANK: GUARDSMAN**



One of the most high-profile veterans of the Falklands war, Weston was a Welsh Guardsman who was injured during the Bluff Cove Air Attacks aboard RFA Sir Galahad.

## THE FALKLANDS: OUR WAR

Royal Marines exercise on the flight deck of HMS Hermes during the war. The high professionalism of the British Task Force was a key factor in ensuring Argentina's defeat



Steel helmets abandoned by Argentine armed forces that surrendered at Goose Green, 21 May 1982







# VICTORY AGAINST THE ODDS

**MAJOR GENERAL JULIAN THOMPSON CB, OBE**

THE CAMPAIGN TO RECLAIM THE FALKLAND ISLANDS FOR BRITAIN WAS A LOGISTICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL HEADACHE, BUT HARD WORK AND DEDICATION WAS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

*Landing craft from HMS Intrepid approach the beach at San Carlos to land troops of 3 Commando Brigade, 21 May 1982*



**A**fter the invasion there was very little time to assemble a task force to sail and reclaim the islands. One of the chief organisers of the swift response was Brigadier Julian Thompson. Now a retired Major General, Thompson was then in command of 3 Commando Brigade.

This highly trained force consisted of three commando units of Royal Marines (each battalion size) and two battalions of the Parachute Regiment. Along with extra units of artillery, engineers, logistics and helicopters, Thompson commanded 5,500 men and the brigade made up the bulk of the land element in the task force. His immediate mission was to plan and execute the initial amphibious landings on East Falkland with his naval opposite number Commodore Michael Clapp.

## HOW WAS NEWS OF THE WAR BROKEN TO YOU? WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION?

At the end of March 1982, I was in total ignorance that we were going to be required until I was woken up in the early hours of 2 April by my boss, General Jeremy Moore, who rang and said, "You know those people down south? They're about to be invaded."

I immediately knew I had to get to the brigade to prepare, load and sail south. This was Friday and we had to sail on Monday and Tuesday. We didn't have long to prepare, and to my horror I realised at 3am that most of my staff were still in Denmark. There was a lot of work to be done.

## WHAT WERE THE PRACTICALITIES OF PLANNING THE SAN CARLOS LANDINGS?

In any amphibious [operation] the question is, 'Where do you land?' [On] a map, the islands appeared to present myriads of places where it would be possible. We were lucky because we had an officer called Ewen Southby-Tailyour who had previously served in the Falklands and was very clued up on the various advantages and disadvantages of the beaches.

What you really need is a beach with a gradient that isn't too steep but not too shallow. This is so you can get in close to shore so people don't have to wade for yards.

There were several different factors that we had to sort out: we needed the ability to get off the beach; for example, it's very foolish to land on a beach with a high cliff behind it. We also need elbow room to deploy troops, including putting Special Forces ashore...

This all takes time and you need to work out how you're going to do it. Are you going to do

it by helicopter, landing craft or a combination of both? Where are the troops going to come from? Which ships are they going to be unloaded from? There are a lot of procedural things you need to get right.

## DID RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MEN UNDER YOUR COMMAND INFLUENCE YOUR PLANS?

I was responsible not just for them but also, with Michael Clapp, for the success of an operation, which if it failed would probably bring down the government and be a slap in the face for Britain for the next 500 years. It was a quite a heavy responsibility but I didn't dwell on it because I had to get on with it.

I'd been in the Royal Marines by then for about 20 years and even though I'd been doing amphibious exercises, I'd never done an operational landing before. I had been the commanding officer of a commando unit and done lots of practice landings, however, so I was actually doing something that wasn't new to me, thank heavens.

## DID YOU HAVE ENOUGH RESOURCES AND SUPPORT TO EXECUTE THE LANDINGS?

The big shortage was helicopters. We didn't have enough and this was a great limitation when it came to building up supplies moving forward, because although the troops could walk or go by landing craft to beaches on the way, the heavy kit had to be lifted. The guns, artillery and ammunition had to go something

**"A GUY STUCK HIS HEAD AROUND THE CORNER AND SAID, 'ATLANTIC CONVEYOR HAS BEEN SUNK'. IT WAS A 'TEAR-IT-UP-AND-START-AGAIN' DAY"**



like 60 miles in a straight line. When in fact, because of the terrain, they couldn't actually fly straight, so it took a huge amount of time.

It takes something like 50-60 helicopter sorties to fly one battery of six guns plus ammunition for a battle. To make things worse, it was in the middle of winter so it got dark at around 4pm and light at 7am, and the helicopters couldn't fly at night.

There were a huge number of limitations caused by the lack of helicopters. This would all have been put right had the four Chinooks, plus some other helicopters that were travelling south in a ship called the SS Atlantic Conveyor, all arrived, but she was sunk before she could offload them. Only one Chinook survived, which happened to be away when the Exocet hit.

I can remember it vividly. I was planning the move forward by helicopter and a guy stuck his head around the corner of the command post and said, "Atlantic Conveyor has been sunk." It was 'tear-it-up-and-start-again' day.

These things happen and the trick is to expect problems and not be thrown by them. You've got to be flexible, resilient, expect chaos to reign and work through it.

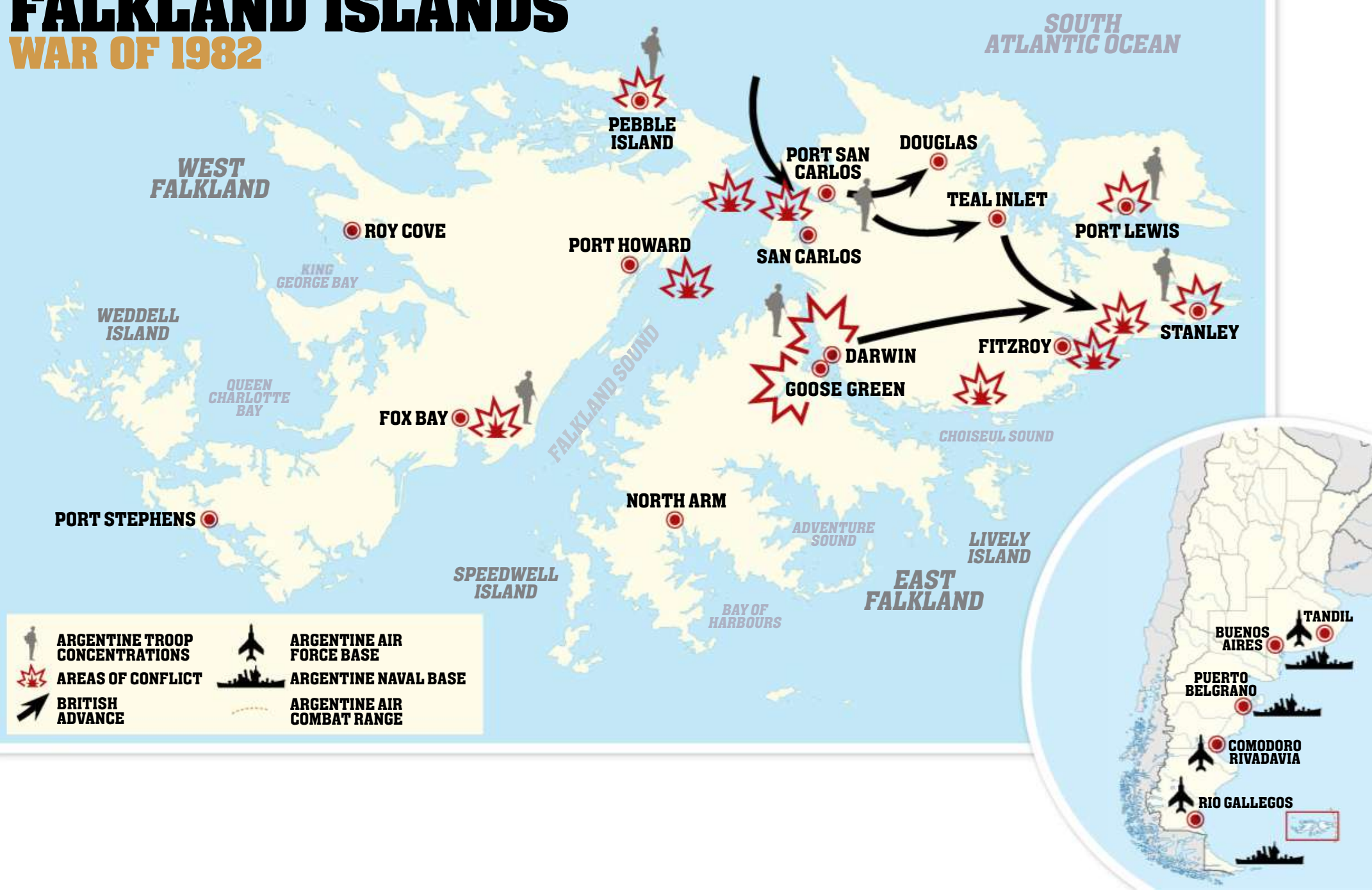
### WHERE WERE YOU POSITIONED DURING THE LANDINGS THEMSELVES?

I was in the amphibious ship HMS Fearless with my staff and there was a purpose built ops room. My job was to get people ashore and then control them afterwards. Therein lay another problem, which was that the maritime radio sets in HMS Fearless were much more powerful than the radios ashore. Initially, we had no communications from the shore, which was extremely frustrating.

Thompson (seated left on rock) with Major General Jeremy Moore outside brigade headquarters in the area of Mount Kent, 13 June 1982



## FALKLAND ISLANDS WAR OF 1982





This was not unexpected, but it was pretty serious. I spent the first bit of the landing in the ship and then decided that it was a complete waste of time and I wasn't finding anything out. The answer was to get into a helicopter and go and talk to people, which is what I did.

I found it was very helpful doing that because you don't want to be a commander and not know what is going on. It's a very demoralising position to be in and the only thing that ever comes back is bad news.

The bad news on this occasion was that two of my helicopters had been shot down with the loss of four aircrew. What were they doing and why had they been shot down? You need to find out that sort of thing and the only way you'll do that is to get off your backside and get ashore.

### WHAT HAPPENED WHEN YOU WENT ASHORE, WERE THERE ANY ENEMY PLANES OR COMBAT INCIDENTS?

There were enemy planes going over and you dodged them. They didn't pay much attention to the small helicopters, they probably didn't even see you. They weren't interested in what was going on ashore. It's quite difficult if you're in a fighter jet to even see people if they're properly camouflaged. So actually, it wasn't dangerous in that sense because curiously enough, the enemy aircraft weren't bothered.

### YOU'VE SAID: "THERE WAS A FEELING WE'D WIN BUT MANY WOULD DIE." DID IT FEEL LIKE A PERILOUS MISSION?

Absolutely, I was convinced we'd win but I thought that the Argentine Air Force would wreak havoc for ships and landing craft. In fact, they didn't and this was partially because they targeted the wrong ships. To start with they decided to target warships, but if they'd gone for logistical landing ships they would have caused absolute chaos. Fortunately they didn't.

Although I was confident, I expected extremely heavy casualties and I'm happy to say that they weren't as bad as we had anticipated. They were heavy enough but were under a third of what we had estimated.

### WHAT WAS MORALE LIKE ON THE GROUND?

The men were in tremendously high spirits. Here they were at the end of seven weeks practicing, actually doing something they were trained for. There was also a feeling of, 'Thank God we got off those ships before we all got sunk!' Everyone was in good spirits.

## "THEY SURRENDERED 800 YARDS FROM WHERE I WAS, AND I FOUND OUT FROM THE BBC!"

By the second day, my HQ and I were ashore. From there, I could go and see people quicker than I could from a ship fighting for its life.

The problem that then came was the time it took to get all the ammunition and guns ashore before we could move off. We weren't going to win the war by sitting in San Carlos.

### ONCE THE LANDINGS WERE OVER, HOW SATISFIED WERE YOU?

I was very satisfied but I couldn't rest on my laurels because the next thing was to get to Stanley. I ordered 2 Para to capture Goose Green. The campaign wasn't going as well as it might have been and we didn't seem to be getting anywhere. I can understand that and Goose Green was a diversion from the main push forward to Stanley. It used up resources but it was a very successful battle. It did a lot of good and helped morale.

While that was going on, the bulk of my brigade were going in an opposite direction by helicopter or on foot towards Stanley and the high ground overlooking it. We had to hold that position to use as a base for our attacks against the Argentines defending Stanley.

### HOW DID YOU FEEL THE CAMPAIGN WENT?

The difficulties were moving the guns and ammunition and the logistic supplies to fight the battles. Obviously, the battles themselves were difficult too but I had every confidence in the competence of the [men].

The blokes on the ground win the battle and all the commander can do is put them into the right position. They're the people who are going to win it, from the commanding officers right down the youngest marine. My job was to put them into the position where they could win and support them when they were there.

### WHAT IS YOUR OPINION OF THE ARGENTINEAN FIGHTING ABILITY?

Not all that high, which wasn't their fault... Most of their troops were conscripts. They were all over 18 but the problem was that their training was inadequate. They didn't use the time that they had available, which was six or

seven weeks, from the time they invaded, to when we arrived, to put right deficiencies in their training. They just sat around – I learned one of the reasons why is that they didn't think we'd ever actually land.

It's a very interesting mindset because one of the biggest traps you can fall into in war is to say, 'We wouldn't do that, so therefore they won't.' You have to assume that the enemy will be as nasty and as crafty as anyone. In war, there is no room for complacency.

### WAS IT A RELIEF WHEN THE ARGENTINES SURRENDERED AT STANLEY?

Yes it was. I learned about the surrender when I was on the outskirts of Stanley with my brigade and we'd been told by General Moore not to advance any further. I was in this house on the outskirts of Stanley with B Company, 2 Para. It was dark because the electricity had been turned off and one of my radio operators swivelled his high-frequency set to *BBC World Service*, which they did every night. I suddenly heard, "The Argentines are signing a surrender in Stanley." This was happening about 800 yards from where I was standing and I learned about it from the BBC 8,000 miles away!

The chap involved was an interpreter and a member of my staff, and had been actually been trying to find me for an hour. He eventually found me and I said, "I've just heard something on the radio" and he said, "That's correct, I've just come from interpreting for General Moore and they've surrendered."

That was the most wonderful news because it meant that no more of my men were going to have to die or be wounded. We had won. We did what we came to do.

### WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WAR NOW?

When people say to me, 'Was it worth it?' I say, "Go and visit the Falkland Islands." The island population is almost twice what it was in 1982. It is self-sufficient except for defence and the defence is equivalent to 0.01 per cent of the total defence budget, so it isn't that big.

I gather it's a totally different place from what it was before 1982. They had no future and now they have one. It's a vibrant society and that's what the guys laid their lives down for. They can rest easy because they did it.

As for the soldiers I commanded, I admired them so much. They were the best soldiers and marines in the world.



HMS Antelope explodes in San Carlos Water on 23 May 1982



Brigadier Thompson (centre, with pipe) soon after walking into Stanley on 14 June 1982. Lighting a cigar on the far left is the journalist and broadcaster Max Hastings who was then the correspondent for the *Evening Standard*



*The P&O cruise liner SS Canberra  
off South Georgia in May 1982.  
Thanks to naval defence cuts, the  
British Task Force had to requisition  
passenger ships as troop carriers*



**“ONE OF THE BIGGEST TRAPS YOU CAN FALL INTO IS  
TO SAY ‘WE WOULDN’T DO THAT, SO THEREFORE, THEY  
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# INSIDE OPERATION MIKADO

## CORPORAL ROBIN HORSFALL

THIS AUDACIOUS BUT HIGHLY FLAWED MILITARY PLAN WAS EFFECTIVELY A SUICIDE MISSION FOR THE SAS, DEEP IN ENEMY TERRITORY

**M**ikado was the codename for a notoriously cancelled British military mission that aimed to destroy the Argentinean jet fighters that carried the fearsome Exocet anti-ship missiles. These weapons were a significant threat to the British Task Force but the plan required B Squadron SAS to land on the runway of Río Grande, Tierra del Fuego, in two C-130 Hercules aircraft. The airbase was on the Argentinean mainland, so attacking it was widely considered to be a suicide mission with little hope for the SAS to escape alive.

One of B Squadron who was expected not to return was Corporal Robin Horsfall. Having joined the British Army at the age of just 15, at just 17 he joined the Parachute Regiment and served three tours of duty in Northern Ireland during the 1970s, before joining the SAS aged 21. In 1980, Horsfall played a significant role during Iranian Embassy Siege in London, where he shot and killed one of the terrorists during the SAS storming of the building.

By 1982, Horsfall was only in his mid-20s, but he trained to take part in an operation that he thought would kill him.

### WHEN THE INVASION HAPPENED, HOW SOON DID YOU PREPARE FOR ACTION?

As soon as the conflict began, B Squadron was allocated this task of going into Argentina to take out the Argentinean jets called Operation

Mikado. G and D Squadron flew down to Ascension Island and we were left behind in the UK to prepare for that. That's the only thing we focused on until we were deployed.

### WHAT WAS YOUR BRIEFING FOR MIKADO?

We would be flying from Brize Norton to Ascension, from where we would fly in two C130 Hercules aircraft along with all of our vehicles, ammunition and missiles, to Río Grande in Argentina. We would land on the runway, drive off the back of the aircraft WWII-style, shoot up as many aircraft as we possibly could destroy – the Super Etendards that were carrying the Exocet missiles – then either get killed or captured.

### WERE YOU AWARE OF THE THREAT POSED BY THE EXOCET MISSILES?

By the time we reached Ascension, two Atlantic conveyors had already been sunk by such missiles, so it was very clear that the way the military viewed it was to sacrifice an SAS squadron, save an aircraft carrier, and win the war. That was the military perspective.

It became clear later that the Argentines only had five Exocet missiles mounted on aircraft and once those had been fired, they really couldn't get hold of any more. Even when there was only one left, our brigadier still wanted us to go down and do the mission.

### WHAT DID YOUR TRAINING INVOLVE FOR THE OPERATION?

We had two Special Forces flight C130s allocated to us at regular periods in the UK. We practiced mounting the vehicles, putting ramps down the back so we could drive straight off, chaining them in the aircraft to make them safe. We flew up to small places off the Scottish coast and landed the two aircraft one behind the other – on one occasion the front aircraft braked too early and the other nearly crashed into the back of it, which would have written us off before the mission even saw 'go'.

We weren't allowed to tell anybody – my wife was pregnant at the time – so it was top-secret. We practiced repeatedly until the day came that we were sent on our way to carry out the mission, but it was frequently postponed until eventually the mission was cancelled.

### WHAT IN YOUR OPINION WERE THE MAIN FLAWS OF MIKADO?

There were many flaws. There was a huge overconfidence in Special Forces operations but they weren't really managed at a higher level. A lot of cowboy ideas were allowed free rein – we were going to fly these two aircraft down into what was a fairly sophisticated military organisation with good ground-to-air radar and surface-to-air missiles protecting their aircraft, on a war footing.

British target practice on Ascension Island in 1982. The SAS endured an agonising wait on the island to get the go-ahead for Operation Mikado



*Inset above: Horsfall (second from right) returning with a paratrooper patrol in Belfast, 1976*



We were very unhappy about it because we didn't think we were going to get on the ground in the first place, we thought we were going to get shot out of the air. Once we were on the ground, we would have carried out our mission and that would have been it. We were fairly unhappy about the fact that this idea of just flying two aircraft down and landing them on the runway was in any way achievable. The brigadier at the time was adamant that this was how he wanted it done. I think it was a crazy mission. We wanted to change it so that we would parachute just off target then walk, but the brigadier would have none of that.

### HOW DID THE SENSE THAT THIS WAS A SUICIDE MISSION AFFECT MORALE? WAS IT POOR AS YOU WERE PREPARING?

Our squadron commander questioned the viability of the mission and was sacked, along with one of the staff sergeants. They were replaced. The rest of us decided that this was why you wear a cap badge, why you're in Special Forces and these are the kinds of missions you're expected to do. So we got on and did the job – fortunately we didn't die.

### HAD THE MISSION GONE AHEAD, WHAT PLANS WERE THERE TO MAKE IT TO THE BORDER? WITH THE ANDES IN BETWEEN, COULD IT HAVE BEEN DONE?

I don't think so – the nearest border with Chile was 80 miles away over very mountainous terrain, and winter was coming. The chances we had were to either be killed or be captured; there wasn't much of a chance of evacuation or escape. The reconnaissance patrol managed to get out to Chile, but they were flown close to the border.



**Above:** Due to the almost suicidal nature of Operation Mikado, Horsfall did not expect to see the birth of his first son. Happily, the operation was cancelled and his son was born four days after the Argentine surrender



**Above:** The task of B Squadron SAS during Operation Mikado was to destroy Super Etendard fighter jets that were armed with Exocets. This aircraft, Sue 204, was used in the attack on SS Atlantic Conveyor

## THE EXOCET THREAT

THE FEARSOME FRENCH-BUILT MISSILE POSED A SIGNIFICANT DANGER TO THE BRITISH TASK FORCE IN 1982

The Exocet is a French-built anti-ship missile that can be fired from ships, submarines or aircraft. 'Exocet' translates as 'flying fish' in French and was first developed in the 1970s.

The missile is an internally guided, rocket-powered weapon that can reach a top speed of Mach 0.9 (1,130 km/h). Its main advantage is its low-flight altitude of one to two metres above water. This means that it can often avoid detection and counterattacks from surface-to-air missiles, thereby increasing its hit probability.

Throughout the 1980s, the state-owned French company Aérospatiale manufactured Exocets that were extensively sold to Argentina. Most of their Exocet stock was ship-launched MM38s, but these were unsuitable for aircraft operations. In contrast, the Argentine Air Force only had five air-launched AM39s, but these were more than enough to wreak havoc on the British Task Force.

In 1982, Argentinean AM39s were used to sink HMS Sheffield and transport ship SS Atlantic Conveyor. An



**Above:** Two sequential stop-frame images of an Exocet MM40 missile striking a test target

MM38 also damaged HMS Glamorgan. In the case of HMS Sheffield, the missile did not actually detonate but the energy of its impact and its exploding unused fuel caused enough damage to sink the ship.

In total, 46 British naval and merchant personnel were killed in Exocet attacks during the Falklands War and the sinking of HMS Sheffield in particular was a heavy blow for the British. The Exocet is still in production today but arguably its most notable moment occurred during the Falklands War.

## “THE ENERGY OF ITS IMPACT AND ITS EXPLODING UNUSED FUEL CAUSED ENOUGH DAMAGE TO SINK THE SHIP”

### YOU HAVE SAID THAT “WAR WAS BRINGING OUT THE BEST AND THE WORST IN THE SAS.” CAN YOU EXPLAIN THAT?

I think the lack of leadership was a big part of it. The Special Air Service was really conceived after Malaya as a reconnaissance unit, very highly motivated men who would carry out recce missions behind enemy lines and then come back and bring infantry in to carry out main attacks.

It had also been a bit of a cowboy unit that had broken loads of rules. It had a lot of small specialist operations that weren't really overseen by anybody higher than the level of colonel. When you get involved in a major operation like the Falklands, those kinds of habits revealed an awful lot of weaknesses. You had guys trying to do infantry tactics that they'd never been trained or prepared for because they'd only come from corps.

People had been over-promoted after the Iranian Embassy Siege too, to ranks that they really weren't qualified for. All these things showed very strongly and internally within the regiment. A lot of us were younger, probably better-prepared infantrymen who had the qualifications – we'd done our junior and senior training and education promotion certificates. We knew how to teach and lead platoons and use infantry tactics but we were very often subject to people who didn't have those experiences. That created a lot of friction.

### ON GOING TO THE FALKLANDS, YOU SAID YOU, “WORE THE CAP, HAD THE PRESTIGE AND NOW YOU NEEDED TO BE WORTHY OF IT.” CAN YOU EXPLAIN THAT?

To become a paratrooper, you really have to be quite a wild young man. To become a Special

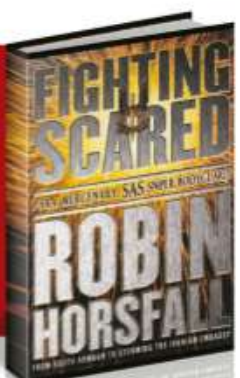
Forces soldier you have to put your life on the line just to get through the selection process. It has to mean a great deal to you. I was a bullied kid and I was very driven to prove that I was as good as the next man. I'd worn the badge, had a few tours of Ireland, and the Iranian Embassy, as well as many other things around the world, but this was the Real McCoy. Do you have the balls and the bottle (or stupidity) to go forward and do it? You realise how completely expendable you are for the policies of your country and your generals.

### YOU'VE SAID THAT THE BRITISH LIBERATED ARGENTINA AS WELL AS THE FALKLAND ISLANDERS DURING THE CAMPAIGN?

A right-wing military junta controlled Argentina. They had huge problems with murder and people vanishing – they called them 'the disappeared'. It was a tyrannical government that considered murder to be the norm and they used the Falklands as a distraction to deflect public opinion. When they lost that war against us, the junta failed and they ended up with a democratic government for the first time in many years. So from my perspective, when we freed the Falkland Islanders, we also freed the Argentinians from that tyrannical government.

*Fighting Scared* is Robin Horsfall's action-packed autobiography that details his fascinating military career. First published in 2002, it is now available as a Kindle edition on Amazon.

For more details visit: [www.amazon.co.uk/Fighting-Scared-Robin-Horsfall-ebook](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Fighting-Scared-Robin-Horsfall-ebook)







A dead Argentinean soldier at 2 Para's final objective on Wireless Ridge. Around 25 Argentine soldiers were killed compared to three British troops during the battle



# BATTLE OF WIRELESS RIDGE

## LIEUTENANT COLONEL PHILIP NEAME

THE FIGHT FOR STANLEY WAS A TOUGH, BUT ULTIMATELY SUCCESSFUL BATTLE FOR THE BRITISH, THAT WITNESSED THE FINAL COLLAPSE OF ARGENTINEAN FORCES

By June 1982, Argentinean forces were in full retreat on the Falkland Islands and the British began to hone in on the capital Stanley. The British had made decisive breakthroughs in the Argentine defences at Mount Harriet, Two Sisters and Mount Longdon. The remaining advance to Stanley required the capture of strategic hills within five miles of the capital, including Mount Tumbledown and Wireless Ridge.

The battles here occurred simultaneously on the night of 13-14 June, with the Battle of Mount Tumbledown becoming the most famous. Nevertheless, Wireless Ridge was just as strategically important and the attack was led by companies of 2nd Battalion, Parachute Regiment (2 Para) and supported by artillery from 29 Commando, Royal Artillery and light tanks of the Blues and Royals Dragoons.

Among the paratroopers was Major Philip Neame. Now a lieutenant colonel, Neame was the commander of D Company, 2 Para and had already seen significant action at the Battle of Goose Green in late May. Wireless Ridge would be his last Falklands battle and he was mentioned in dispatches for his service during the conflict.

### HOW DID YOU AND YOUR MEN FEEL ABOUT GOING INTO COMBAT AGAIN SO SOON AFTER THE BATTLE OF GOOSE GREEN?

I think all the Toms (British soldiers) and myself recognised that we were professionals but there was a bit of quiet muttering that said, "Couldn't someone else take this on?" However, that was quickly answered by, "Well no one else can do it better than we will!"

### WHAT WERE THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LED UP TO THE BATTLE?

We had a brief rest of a few days where we had some sort of shelter. We also went on to 'central feeding' for the first time since we had been ashore, as opposed to being on 24-hour rations. The local farmer killed a sheep to throw in the central feeding pot but the net effect of that was 50 per cent of the battalion went down with the squits. That really hit us, myself included, after we had flown up by helicopter to reinforce 3 Commando Brigade.

We then had this night approach while all the other main battles were going on at Mount Longdon. During this approach, it was snowing slightly and we were marching in file order. Every time we stopped, half the battalion stepped to the

side and lowered their trousers, which is not quite the situation you really want on an approach to battle! It could have been seriously demoralising.

### HOW REASSURING WAS IT TO HAVE GREATER ARTILLERY SUPPORT AT WIRELESS RIDGE THAN AT GOOSE GREEN?

We'd already won the first round of battles around Stanley and this was effectively the finale. By then, all the artillery that had been sent was available to support us so we had two full batteries of guns and abundant ammunition. We also had two ships with guns in support. So unlike Goose Green where we had minimal fire support and precious little intelligence, we went into Wireless Ridge in a completely different context.

We launched with abundant fire support and if there was a little unease about going into 'contact' again, that was undoubtedly allayed by the fact that we were promised abundant fire support and in the early stages of the battle we certainly had it.

### WHAT WERE YOUR OBJECTIVES?

I had three objectives. I was working independently of the other two companies



*On 14 June, 2 Para entered Stanley. The paratroopers were the first British soldiers to re-enter the Falklands capital and forced the Argentinean surrender*



*Below: British soldiers mopping up operations at first light on Wireless Ridge. The majority of the battle was fought at night*



*Below: 'Endex' was the codeword for the end of the war. To celebrate the victory, the men of 2 Para donned their famous red berets on Wireless Ridge*



for most of the night and secured the first objective, which we nicknamed 'Rough Diamond'. It was almost a walkthrough. When A and B companies took their objective, which we called 'Apple Tart', they found much the same. The artillery and a troop of supporting light tanks had done the work for us and a lot of the enemy had fled. Those that remained didn't have a lot of fight left in them.

I took the next objective, which was called 'Blueberry Pie', with similar ease and it all seemed to be going very well until we got to the final objective. I got my FOO (Forward Observation Officer) to call up the final target but the rounds landed on us instead!

The British Army is very literal so when it came to getting tasks and resources, there were mix-ups. I didn't have a fully trained FOO and he called up the wrong target number.

Mistakes happen in war, one just has to be a bit phlegmatic about it, but I certainly wasn't at the time because we had 30 rounds of airburst on us! The battery signal sergeant tried to say that it wasn't our artillery but the Argentines didn't have airburst so I knew very well that it was our artillery that landed on us.

#### **WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT INCIDENT OF FRIENDLY FIRE?**

We were very lucky, we only had one person killed and one person injured. It could have been devastating. I realised what had happened and I got the FOO to call the right target number. We then went through a long delay while he adjusted the target. I said, "You

## **"EVERY TIME WE STOPPED, HALF THE BATTALION STEPPED TO THE SIDE AND LOWERED THEIR TROUSERS, WHICH IS NOT QUITE THE SITUATION YOU REALLY WANT ON AN APPROACH TO BATTLE!"**

don't need to adjust the target, just call up the last one that landed on us" but by then the gunners' nerves had gone and they didn't want to do that.

I eventually got the target adjusted, called up a fire mission and then B Company claimed the rounds were landing on them! It appeared that some of the guns had gone out of alignment in the peat so once again we had to hold on and not put in our final attack.

All this went on for a good hour or more and I have to say that the saviour at that moment were the light tanks and the CVR(T)s of the Blues and Royals who were in the same position as A and B Companies. They were able to engage the final ridgeline while the artillery sorted out that pretty pathetic mess.

#### **WHAT HAPPENED WHEN YOU DID FINALLY ADVANCE?**

It was interesting. There were discussions with the CO about when I was going to attack and I rather abruptly said, "When I get the artillery that's been promised." They were not helpful exchanges but these things happen.

Eventually we got four guns on target and I felt like there was no point waiting. We needed to get going. We attacked with four guns

supporting us and had a quick-fire mission on the final objective. We were attacking from an unexpected direction and the enemy had been entirely focused to the north where the CVR(T)s had been engaging them.

It was a surprise attack until we were crossing this low area between the two elements of that final ridge and one of the Toms set off a trip flare. The game was obviously up then and their small-arms fire turned on us. Everyone hit the deck fairly quickly.

That was a tricky moment. The natural thing is that you hit the dirt as quick as you can and hug it pretty tight. However, you can't stay there because you're in a killing zone so eventually we knew we had to get moving. That was down to the leadership at every level, it wasn't just me. There was a lot of shouting and trying to get our nerve up and eventually we got up. It was all the way down the line, platoon and section commanders did their bit to steel themselves up and as a group, we all launched forward.

We were quite lucky, we only picked up one other casualty at that point. A guy was killed but that was all. There was a wave of small-arms fire but most of it was going above our heads. It is a common thing at night that people tend to shoot high and so we closed into position.



Argentinean soldiers  
patrolling near Stanley. Many  
troops were conscripts





Once we were into the position I felt “That’s it, the game is ours now” because after Goose Green, the Argentineans didn’t have much stomach for close-quarters fighting.

### HOW DID THE BATTLE EVENTUALLY END FOR YOU?

There was a lot going on and the CO was getting concerned that we might lose the position, but I don’t think there was ever any risk of that.

Then daylight began to come up and we could see the enemy pouring off the top of Tumbledown. At that point, the harassing small arms and sniper fire ceased and we started to engage them with machine guns at maximum range. It wasn’t particularly effective but it was better than nothing.

We eventually stopped that and tried to engage the enemy with our own artillery when we saw literally hundreds pouring off Tumbledown in single file. Further east, I could see similar numbers going out of Stanley up towards the top of Sapper Hill.

The CO came to join me and also witnessed this. He said, “Why aren’t you engaging them?” and I said, “If we engage them all we’re going to get is enemy artillery fire back. Some are observing us and it’s almost out of range.”

He thought we should engage. With some reluctance, I got one machine gun right up the end of the position to start shooting at these Argentineans coming off Tumbledown.

It was at that moment that we effectively saw the collapse of the Argentinean army. It was

in moments: one moment they still appeared able to resist, fight and engage even if it was just with artillery, then ten minutes later... nothing. Their only intent appeared to be to flee to Stanley as quickly as possible. It was a dramatic moment really because it happened in a space of minutes.

The CO, David Chaundler, tried to put this across to commando headquarters that resistance had evaporated and we needed to hot-pursuit them into Stanley. Again, in much the same way that he hadn’t quite believed my messages earlier, commando headquarters were also then reluctant to accept this. They couldn’t see the army collapsing so quickly and it wasn’t until Julian Thompson came up in a helicopter and saw with his own eyes this visible collapse that we managed to get the order to follow them into Stanley.

That was how 2 Para ended up being the first battalion into Stanley. I don’t think that was the original plan because no one expected the Argentinians to collapse.

### WERE YOU ONE OF THE FIRST MEN WITH 2 PARA TO ENTER STANLEY?

Yes. A Company initially led the way and then D Company and myself followed, we were right behind them. They secured the racecourse and we ended up holding the easternmost part of the town. We were told to stop just short of Government House because it appeared that negotiations were going on with Mario Menéndez (Argentine military governor of the Falklands) and they didn’t want a storming of the house.

We were told to stop and make sure that no one advanced beyond there. Only one person did try to advance beyond there and that was Max Hastings from the *Evening Standard*. He proceeded to abuse one of my soldiers on the checkpoint so I said, “Let the silly bugger through and see if he gets shot!”

### HOW SATISFIED DID YOU FEEL WHEN YOU REALISED THAT THE WAR WAS EFFECTIVELY OVER?

It was indescribable. There was relief but for me there was real pride in my blokes. We’d had the lion’s share, there was no question on Wireless Ridge that we’d had one or two setbacks with the artillery and we’d come through it. It was a very uncomfortable two hours before Tumbledown fell, it had been a really unpleasant time. Nonetheless, they had held their nerve and I was just overwhelmed with pride for them.



## THE ULYSSES TRUST

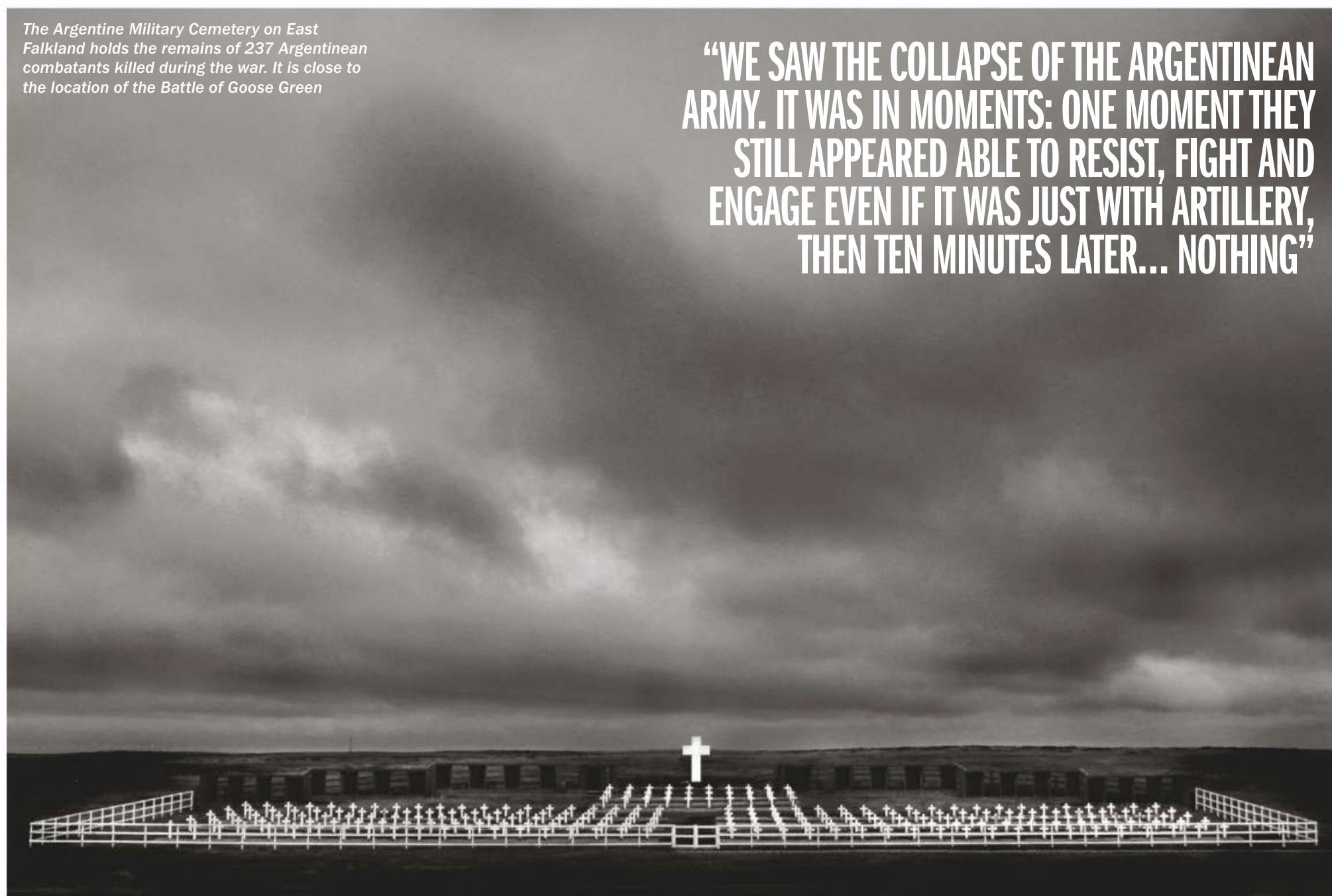
Philip Neame is the founder of the Ulysses Trust, which provides funding assistance to challenging expeditions and adventurous activities involving members of the Volunteer Reserve Forces and Cadet Forces of the UK.

Since 1992, it has supported more than 2,000 expeditions with donations of almost £2.5 million.

For more information on donations and grant applications visit: [www.ulysses trust.co.uk](http://www.ulysses trust.co.uk)

The Argentine Military Cemetery on East Falkland holds the remains of 237 Argentinean combatants killed during the war. It is close to the location of the Battle of Goose Green

“WE SAW THE COLLAPSE OF THE ARGENTINEAN ARMY. IT WAS IN MOMENTS: ONE MOMENT THEY STILL APPEARED ABLE TO RESIST, FIGHT AND ENGAGE EVEN IF IT WAS JUST WITH ARTILLERY, THEN TEN MINUTES LATER... NOTHING”







# SURVIVAL, CARE AND RECONCILIATION

## SIMON WESTON, CBE

THE FAMOUS VETERAN DISCUSSES THE FALKLANDS WAR 37 YEARS ON, HOW CARE FOR SOLDIERS HAS CHANGED DURING THE DECADES, AND BEFRIENDING HIS FORMER ENEMY

**O**n 8 June 1982, the British landing ship RFA Sir Galahad was bombed by Argentine Skyhawk fighters in what became known as the Bluff Cove Air Attacks. A total of 48 soldiers and crewmen were killed in the explosions and subsequent fire. Scores more were injured including 20-year old guardsman Simon Weston.

Weston had joined the British Army aged 16 and had already served with the 1st Battalion, Welsh Guards in Berlin, Northern Ireland and Kenya. In the aftermath of the attack on RFA Sir Galahad, he was the most severely injured casualty to survive the incident, over the entire war, suffering 46 per cent burns. Weston spent the best part of five years in hospital and as of this interview in March 2017, he had undertaken 96 major surgical procedures.

Weston's long and courageous recovery became well known throughout Britain and despite his injuries, he threw himself into charity work. He is arguably the most famous veteran from the Falklands War and makes regular media appearances alongside public speaking and writing books. For his charity work, Weston was appointed an OBE in 1992 and CBE in 2016 among other numerous honours. Now associated with and the patron of several charities, Weston discusses the legacy of 1982, the current state of care for wounded soldiers and befriending the Argentinean pilot who bombed RFA Sir Galahad.

### IN THE 1980S, WHAT WAS THE LEVEL OF CARE FOR YOUR PHYSICAL INJURIES COMPARED TO TODAY?

That's a bigger question than you actually think. Back then, from the battlefield side of it,

everything was a bit 'Heath Robinson'. We were in an old meat freezer/packing centre and they were using the rails and racks that they had for hanging and storing meat. It had fallen into disrepair – they were using these rusty racks as operating tables.

With regard to the treatment, it's important to understand that everything moves on. Nothing stays the same and in medicine, for somebody to benefit today, somebody had to suffer yesterday. Wound dressings are far more superior and stretchers are lighter. The training is better as far as field medicine is concerned for each private soldier. Equipment has greatly improved and more people are living today in conflict because of body armour, but then that means you've got more casualties with limbs missing.

It was totally different in our day. Kevlar is more prevalent now. It restricts the amount of injury but also restricts death. In the Falklands we lost 255 dead. If we had had body armour we might have been able to slash that number by half.

### HAS CARE AND AWARENESS IMPROVED FOR SOLDIERS WITH INVISIBLE WOUNDS SUCH AS POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)? IF NOT, WHAT AREAS NEED IMPROVEMENT?

It has improved dramatically because in our day PTSD was totally ignored. It didn't exist and the Duke of Edinburgh said, "There's no such thing as PTSD, just a lack of moral fibre." That was the attitude back then and they refused to acknowledge it. Even though the Falklands guys were the first to present it, look for help and complain about it, a lawsuit was brought out so that they didn't have to spend money on us.

The Falklands guys really got the crappy end of the stick.

Things have improved but there's still a long way to go. For the other ranks like senior officers, they get the privilege of somewhere else to go, but ordinary soldiers rely on charity. Is that correct? It's the only thing available so we have to deal with what we've got. Is there enough money in the pot? No there isn't, so will we be able to change things that dramatically? Probably not, but it doesn't change the fact that it still needs doing. We still need it done. We still need to have people looked after.

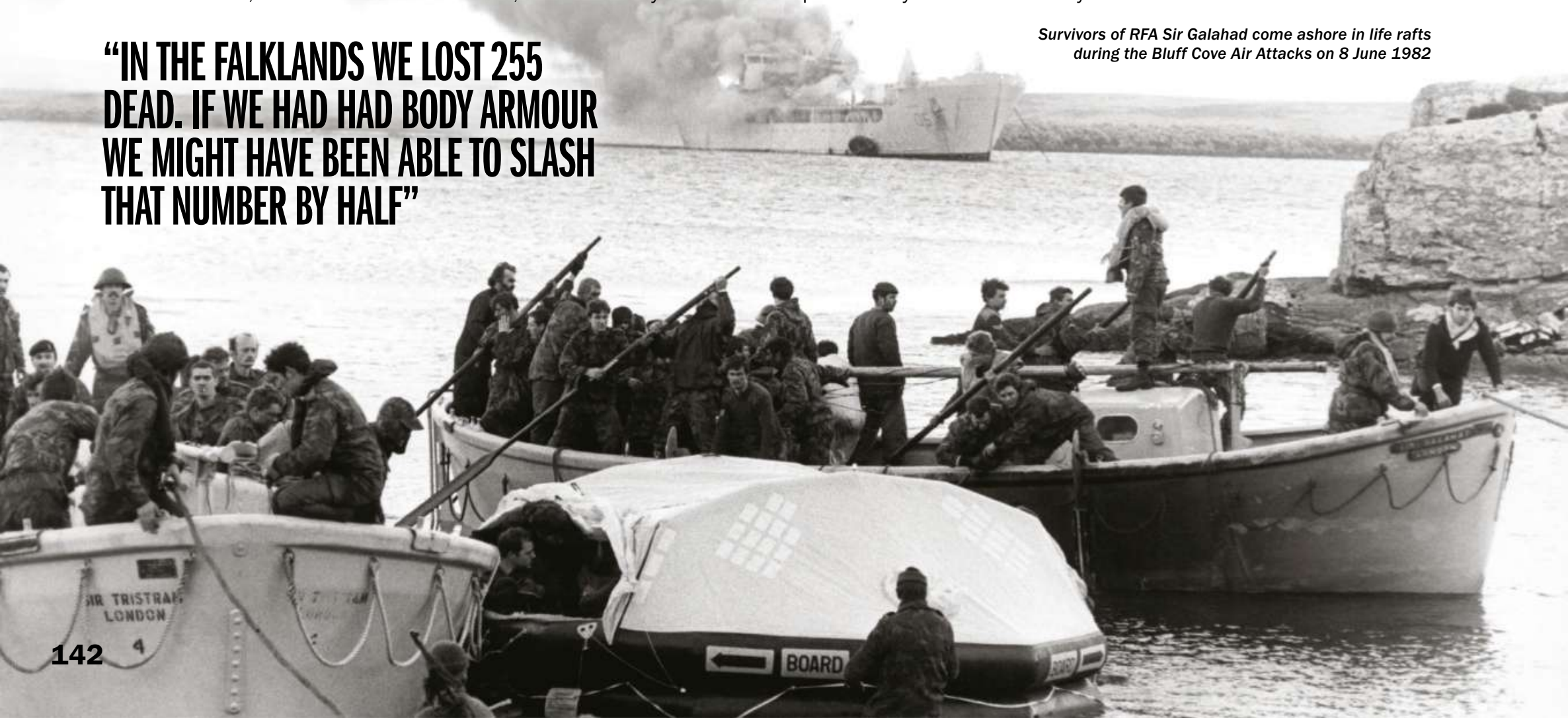
### YOU'RE OFTEN REFERRED TO AS A 'WAR HERO'. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT, BOTH WHEN IT'S SAID ABOUT YOU AND THE TERM IN GENERAL?

If people want to say those things, that's entirely up to them, I can't stop people being kind and generous. It's not what I see and if you talk to anybody else that gets that label, they don't see themselves like that either. I tried to help people inside the fire but when I realised I was burning and falling apart myself, then I realised that I had to get the heck out of there.

Heroes are made by other people. It's what other people say about you that creates the story. You do what you do at the time, you're not thinking about what's going to be said or written about you 20 years later. When I was on top of the ship, all I wanted to do was survive. When I was surviving in hospital and trying to keep my mind together, all I wanted to do was be the Simon Weston that I was before and I wanted to go back to the army and play rugby. Nothing that other people say is really what you think of yourself.

*Survivors of RFA Sir Galahad come ashore in life rafts during the Bluff Cove Air Attacks on 8 June 1982*

**"IN THE FALKLANDS WE LOST 255 DEAD. IF WE HAD HAD BODY ARMOUR WE MIGHT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SLASH THAT NUMBER BY HALF"**





# AN ONGOING DISPUTE

THE BRITISH VICTORY IN THE FALKLANDS WAR HAD SIGNIFICANT RAMIFICATIONS IN BOTH THE UNITED KINGDOM AND ARGENTINA, AND ITS LEGACY IS STILL A TOXIC ISSUE IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

The Argentinean defeat in the Falklands was a huge blow for the military junta, and Leopoldo Galtieri was forced to resign soon after the surrender in June 1982. Democratic elections were then held and military rule was finally ended after eight years in 1983. Argentina has been a democratic country ever since.

There were also significant developments in Britain. Margaret Thatcher had been elected as Conservative prime minister in 1979, but her first term was dominated by controversial economic policies and civil unrest. By 1982, she had become unpopular but the British victory in the Falklands boosted her premiership and in 1983, she won the most decisive general election since 1945. The war arguably boosted the global prestige of Britain and enabled it to shake off the perception of a nation in decline.

As for the Falkland Islands, the war cemented the islanders' resolve to remain under British rule. Since 1982, Britain has maintained a sizeable garrison on the islands and invested in the local economy. Income has been boosted by military expenditure, fishing licenses and tourism. In 2013, a sovereignty referendum held by the islanders voted 99.8 per cent in favour of remaining a British overseas territory and Prime Minister David Cameron acknowledged the result.

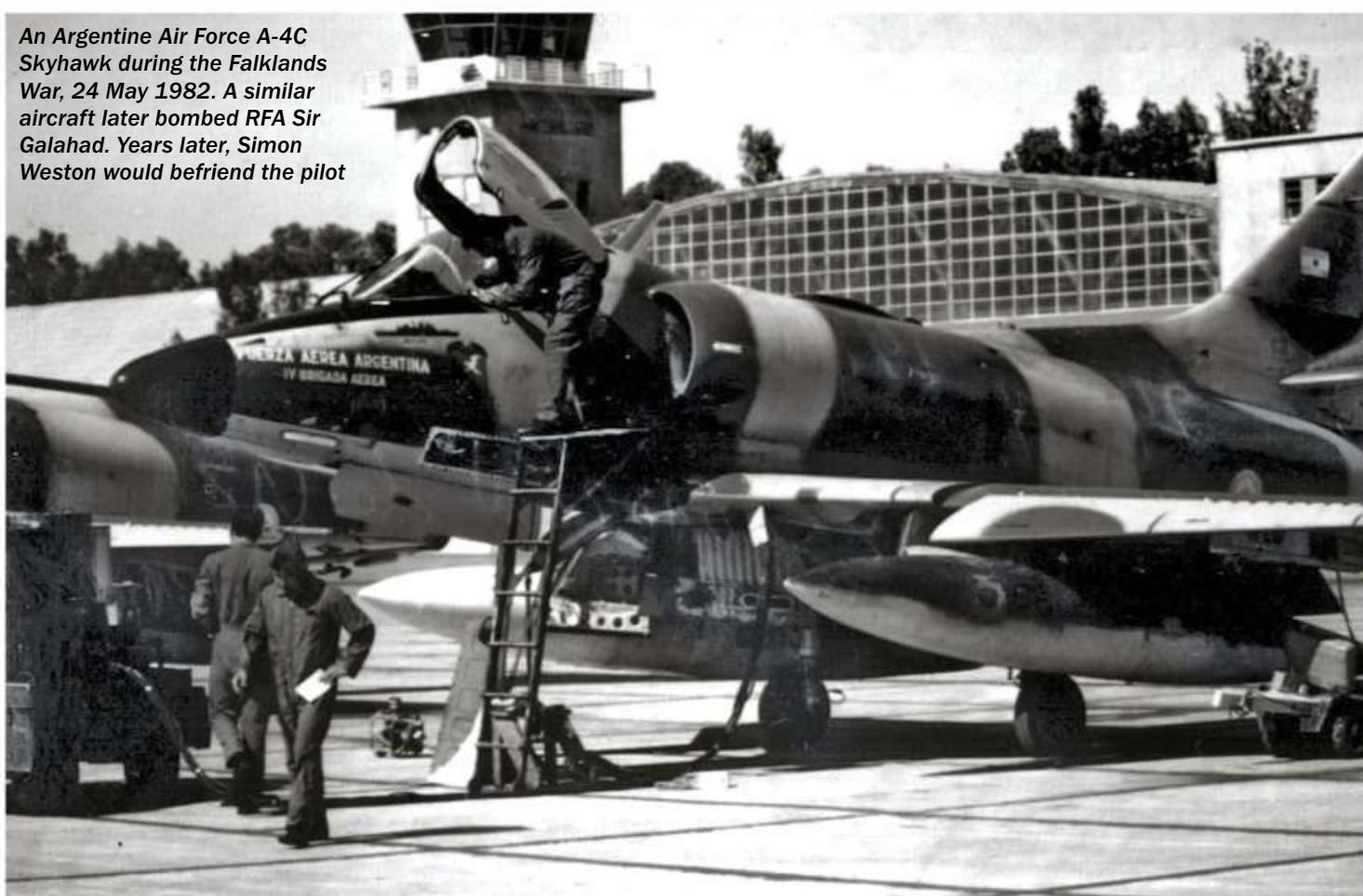
Nevertheless, after 37 years, Argentinean governments still dispute British sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, despite the war and the referendum. Bilateral relations were restored between the two countries in 1992 but the 'Malvinas' are still claimed as Argentinean territory.

It is a political situation that Julian Thompson acknowledges will probably never end, "I'm not dismayed by the current political posturing of the Argentineans, I expect it. I don't think it'll ever go away and we kid ourselves if we think it will. At the same time we must recognise that the people of the islands have the right to choose what government they live under."

**"A REFERENDUM HELD BY THE ISLANDERS VOTED 99.8 PER CENT IN FAVOUR OF REMAINING A BRITISH OVERSEAS TERRITORY"**

Images: Alamy, Getty, TopFoto

An Argentine Air Force A-4C Skyhawk during the Falklands War, 24 May 1982. A similar aircraft later bombed RFA Sir Galahad. Years later, Simon Weston would befriend the pilot



## HOW DID YOU COME TO BEFRIEND THE ARGENTINEAN PILOT THAT BOMBED RFA SIR GALAHAD (FIRST LIEUTENANT CARLOS CACHÓN) AND WHAT DOES THE RECONCILIATION MEAN TO YOU?

I was offered the opportunity to meet Carlos, which I was very dubious about. It was all arranged and at the last minute, I never met him. I almost didn't do it because I was running through a whole gamut of emotions. However, we did eventually meet and he actually got rid of my nightmares.

For ten years, my nightmares had been filled with a screaming black jet with this dark, hooded figure with demonic, flaming red eyes. I would wake up every night, my bed would be soaking and I would be on fire. I still wake up at two or three o'clock in the morning now, but the difference is I'm not on fire anymore.

Meeting Carlos helped me with all that. I didn't do it for anyone else and I make no apologies for it. I do apologise if it upsets some of my colleagues and those who lost people. It wasn't my intention, but sometimes you have to be selfish and do things that help you through life. The reasonable people in the world will understand why I did it.

There was also no 'reconciliation'. We'd been to war, he'd worn his country's uniform and I'd worn mine. We just met and got on, it's nothing bigger than that. We've stayed in contact and remained friends and the more we meet, the better our friendship goes. He wasn't the best man at my wedding, he wasn't the man giving blood to save my life: he was the man who blew us up. He killed 48 of my comrades and friends and he nearly killed me but that is all.

When he was told he was going to meet someone with mental problems because of what happened he said yes in a heartbeat, so he showed great moral courage. I will always thank him for that because it was war, it wasn't personal. We have to respect that side of it. Humanity must come into conflict at some point.

## WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON THE RECENT EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY ARGENTINEAN WAR DEAD?

If they can identify them, why not? It gives families somewhere to go and lay their mementos and remembrance keepsakes. I think everyone should have a focus to go and grieve. You have to remember, they were somebody's son, dad, uncle and brother as well. They weren't evil people, they were just Argentinean soldiers. They were human beings the same as us.

## DOES IT FEEL STRANGE FOR THE FALKLANDS WAR TO BE CONSIDERED AS HISTORY, YEARS LATER?

I'm glad to be answering this question years on, and there are lot of boys who would love to be answering it too. The 48 men from that ship would love to get the aches and pains that I get every morning. The realities are that if you're still around to tell the tale years on, it ain't been that bad.

To be classed as the worst injured to come back from the conflict, it feels like my life and somebody else's life all in the same token. I was only 20 at the time I was blown up, so you get all those perspectives and you think, 'Blinkin' heck!' It's all contradictions now, I hate being older but I'm so glad that I am.

The bombing didn't end my life, it just changed it and I have never wanted to be defined by what happened to me, but rather by what I did about it. I've been incredibly fortunate.

## CARE AFTER COMBAT



Simon Weston is a trustee for Care after Combat, a UK-based charity providing professional assistance for the wellbeing of veterans and their families.

Their mission is to support veterans with alcohol and substance misuse problems and the reduction in numbers of re-offending veterans in the criminal justice system.

For more information visit: [www.careaftercombat.org](http://www.careaftercombat.org)



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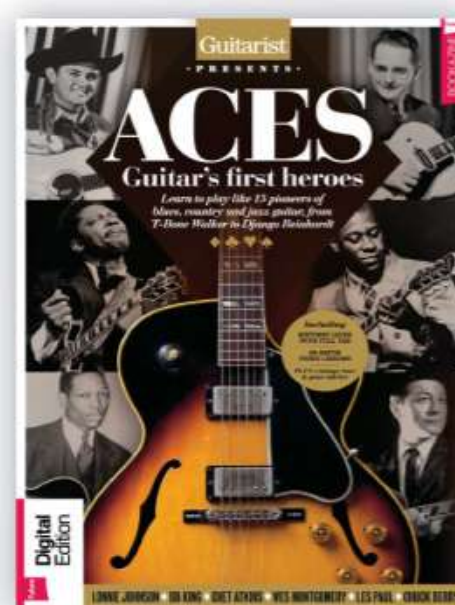
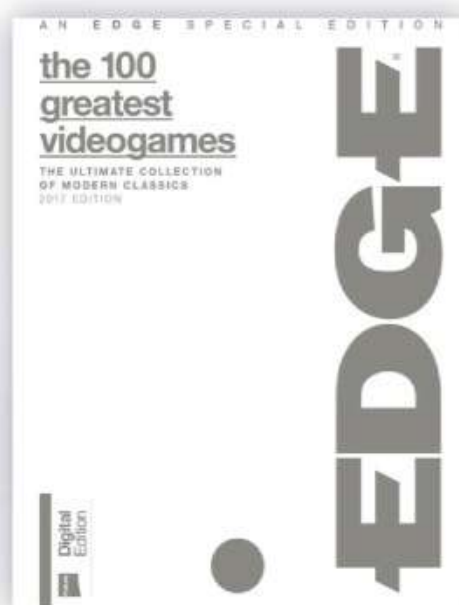
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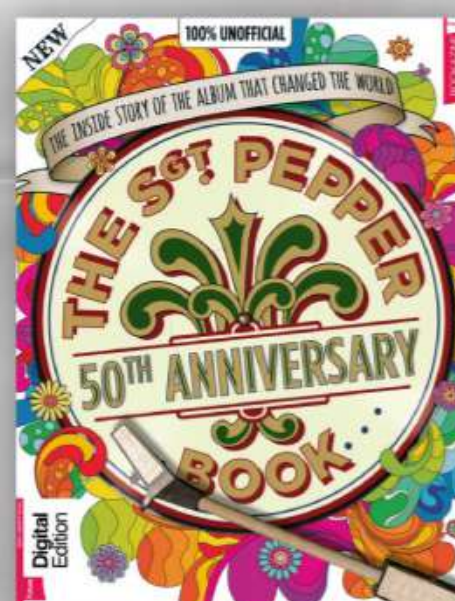
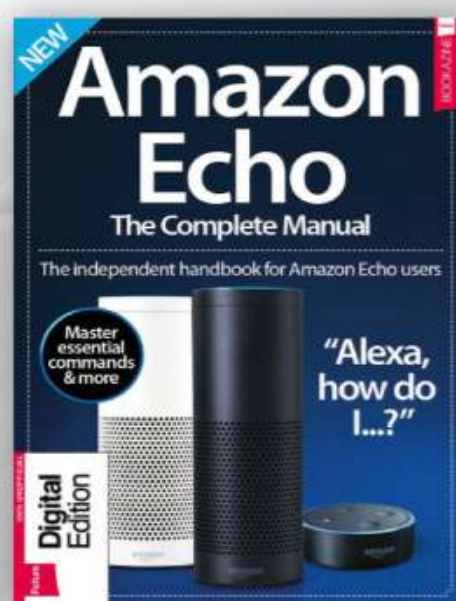
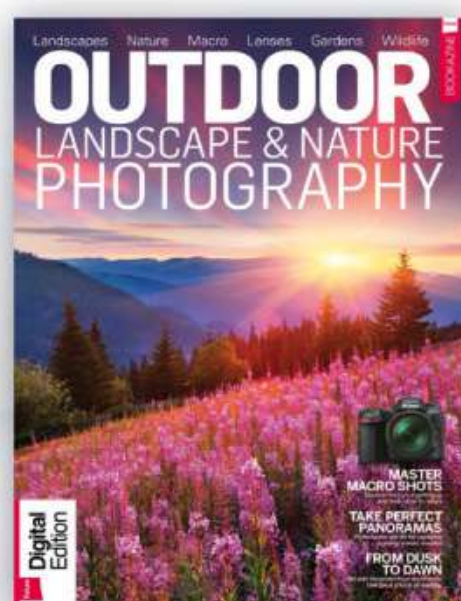
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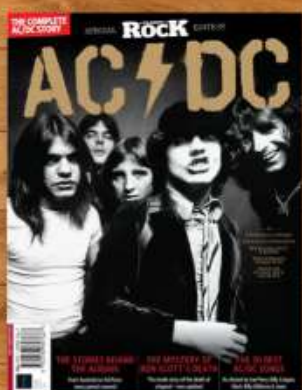


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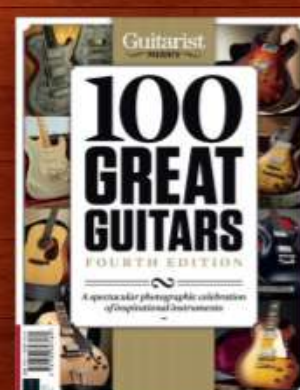
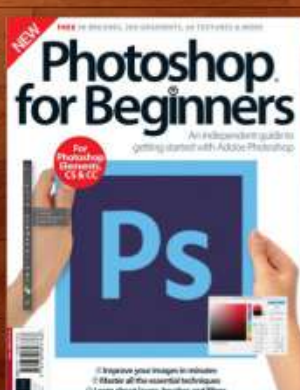
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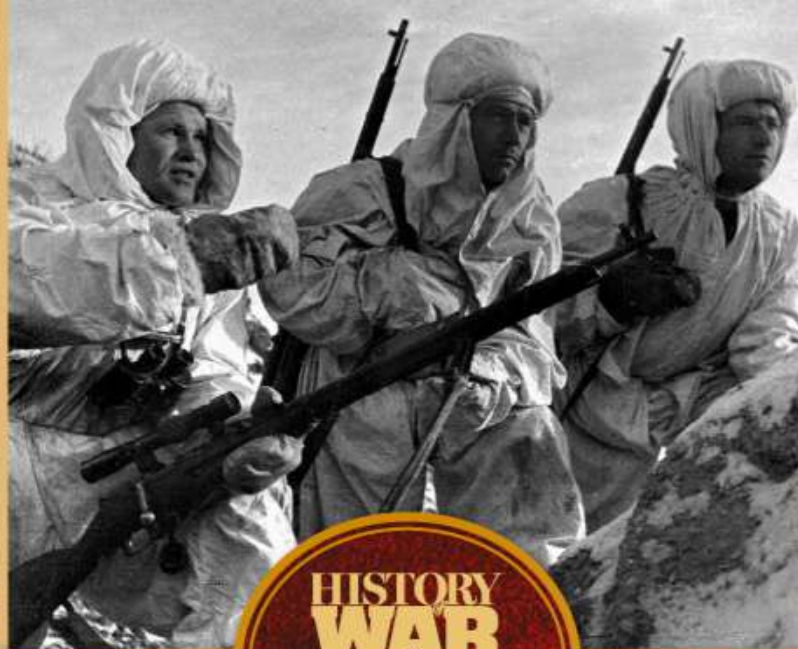


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